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53 SEP

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Capullo '96

McFARLANE

BRIAN

The ABYSS. A HARSH BLACKNESS SO DENSE NO **LIGHT** HAS EVER INTRUDED HERE. WHILE GOD WAS CREATING THE COSMOS, GIVING LIFE TO EVERY CORNER, HIS OMNISCIENT PRESENCE CAST A **SHADOW**. PLANTED THERE AS WELL WAS A SEED. IT GREW STEADILY IN THE COLD PALL OF THE ALMIGHTY.

THIS PATCH OF INFINITY, JUST TO THE LEFT OF THE PRECIOUS LIGHT, IS NOW A **HARVEST GROUND** FOR THE DIVINELY THWARTED SEED.

SEED WE NOW CALL **SIN.**

IT GERMINATES IN MEN OF **WEAKNESS.** LUST, GREED, AND THE OTHER DEADLY SINS TAKE ROOT IN THEM.

EMBEDDED NOW IN THIS DARK LOAM IS A MAN CONDEMNED BY HIS OWN ACTS UPON HUMANITY:

Lt. COLONEL AL SIMMONS.

HE'S BEEN HERE BEFORE. HIS CONSCIOUS MIND DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE PLACE.

HIS SENSES DO.

IT HAPPENED IN A BLINK THE FIRST TIME... A SPLIT SECOND BETWEEN LIFE, DEATH AND UNDEATH.

RIGHT NOW, HE'S ONLY DISTANTLY AWARE OF THE STENCH OF MURDER...

...THE PIQUANT TASTE OF CHARRED FLESH...

...THE HOLLOW SOUND OF AN AGONIZED CRY.

IT'S ALL SO FAMILIAR.

THIS IS WHERE HE DIED.

WHERE HE WAS CURSED.

IN EXCHANGE FOR THAT UNHOLY BLESSING HE PAID THE ULTIMATE PRICE: HE RELENQUISHED HIS SHARE OF ETERNITY.

HE IS RETURNED NOW TO HIS DEMONIC BIRTHPLACE.

WHERE HE MADE HIS DEAL.

NO.

LEVEL NINE.

THE NIGHTMARISH REALM THAT VOMITED SPAWN BACK TO LIFE.

WHOSE RULER CRAVES THAT WHICH HE HIMSELF WAS NOT FURNISHED: **SOULS.**

THEY ARE EITHER GIVEN OVER AT DEATH OR SURRENDERED WILLINGLY BY THOSE WHO REJECT GOD. EACH SOUL HELPS TO AMASS AN ARMY FIT TO CONQUER THE HEAVENS.

LORDING OVER IT ALL IS THE DEVIL KNOWN AS **THE MALEBOLGIA.** HE WAITS OUT THE SLOW CENTURIES UNTIL THE BATTLE WITH GOD IS DECLARED...

... UNTIL HIS ARMY WILL **VANQUISH** THE **LIGHT.**

INTO EVERY CORNER, THE **SHADOWS** WILL SEEP--

-- DRIVING HOME THE VICTORY HIS GENERALS HAVE WON.

AL SIMMONS IS EXPECTED TO ONE DAY BECOME SUCH A GENERAL...

...WHICH IS WHY SPAWN IS NOW BEING PUT THROUGH THE PACES. MALEBOLGIA WISHES TO SEE HIS POTENTIAL FIRST-HAND...

...TO BEST GAUGE WHETHER HE'LL BE ABLE TO **GERMINATE** THE EVIL LIVING DEEP WITHIN SIMMONS' BEING.

UMPFF

SO THERE MUST BE **TESTS.**

MIXED WITH CRUEL IRONY.

you scream, i scream, we both scream for ice cream

HE'D KILLED HIM ONCE BEFORE, SPAWN HAD. *

*ISSUE 5 -- Tom.

KING-SIZE!

BUT THIS IS HELL. THIS IS NOW.

LOGIC ISN'T ACCORDED ANY FAVORS. INSTINCTIVELY, SPAWN KNOWS THIS. MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE ACCEPTS IT WITHOUT QUESTION.

ON EARTH, BILLY KINCAID HAD FALLEN TO THE LOWEST POSSIBLE LEVEL KNOWN TO MAN: A MURDERING PEDOPHILE.

STRIPPING CHILDREN OF THEIR INNOCENCE... AND SOCIETY OF ITS CHILDREN.

THE HELLSPAWN DISEMBOWELS HIM A **SECOND** TIME WHILE WISHING THAT KINCAID WILL TRY TO GET UP SO HE CAN GUT HIM **AGAIN**.

AND SO, SPAWN HAS PASSED THIS TEST.

I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING, BUT IT REALLY IS ME, SWEET-HEART.

GOD, HOW CAN THIS BE?!

HE DESERVED IT. THANK YOU, AL.

WANDA!!!?

BECAUSE I WANTED IT. TO BE BY YOUR SIDE... FOR-EVER. I KNOW THAT GOD SCORNS THOSE WHO TAKE THEIR OWN LIVES...

...BUT SUICIDE WAS THE ONLY CHOICE. WE HAVE TO BE TOGETHER.

HE STARES IN HER EYES. THEY DON'T LIE.

HE CHERISHES THIS ELUSIVE MOMENT AS THEY EMBRACE.

THE WAIT HAS BEEN SO VERY LONG.

I DIDN'T MEAN FOR ANY OF THIS TO HAPPEN.

I KNOW YOU DIDN'T, AL. BUT I'M HERE... *WE'RE* HERE. *ALL* OF US.

YOU WERE ALWAYS TOO MUCH MAN FOR ONE WOMAN.

NOW YOU CAN HAVE ME ANY WAY YOU WANT. FAITHFUL. LUSTFUL. ADORING.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO END. WE CAN SATISFY ALL YOUR DESIRES.

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT EMOTION YOU FEEL. WE... *I* CAN FULFILL YOU. *'TILL DEATH DO US PART."* REMEMBER THAT, OUR WEDDING VOW?

FOR ONE BRIEF, FROZEN MOMENT, AL SIMMONS BELIEVES HIS TORMENT IS FINALLY AT AN END. EUPHORIA REIGNS. HIS CURSE HAS BEEN LIFTED.

AS HE FALLS, IT STILL DOESN'T REGISTER. THIS IS A HOAX. A SHAM.

A TEST.

EXPLOITING THE WEAKNESS THAT FOREVER DAMNED HIM: HIS LOVE FOR HIS BEAUTIFUL WIFE.

SHE'S THE REASON HE NOW EXISTS, WHY HE HAD TO GO ON IN THIS NEW, WRETCHED FORM.

HE CLOSES HIS EYES AS SHE POUNCES...

HE WON'T LET THAT HAPPEN.

BUT NOW THEY'RE MOCKING HER AND WHAT SHE REPRESENTS.

...NOT WANTING TO WITNESS WHAT MUST NOW BE DONE.

IT'S NOT HER, HE KEEPS TELLING HIMSELF. IT'S NOT HER.

EVEN AS THE SULPHURIC AIR ECHOES SICKENINGLY WITH THE SOUND OF SNAPPING BONES AND CARTILAGE.

WHAT IS MOST TORTUROUS IS HEARING WANDA'S SWEET VOICE BEGGING FOR MERCY.

HE CAN'T **BEAR** IT.

LIKE SOME CRAZED, PSYCHOTIC TARZAN HE **SCREAMS**, DROWNING OUT THE PITIABLE PLEASE.

AS ONE OF THE CHANGELINGS BRUSHES AGAINST HIM, SPAWN GETS A SENSE OF THEIR TRUE FORM.

HIS GREEN EYES PEEL OPEN, SPILLING FORTH RAGING ENERGY.

THEN, A SINGLE WORD IS WHISPERED.

ENOUGH.

GODDAMMIT, I'VE SUFFERED ENOUGH!

MALEBOLGIA WANTS A WAR, HE'S GOT IT! I DON'T GIVE A CRAP ANYMORE.

SEND YOUR PUPPETS! EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM. I'LL TAKE 'EM.

YOU WANT ME TO BE LIKE YOU, FINE. I'LL BE VICIOUS, EVIL, SOULLESS!! AFTER I'VE RIPPED YOUR THROAT OUT.

YOU BASTARD. THIS IS GOING TO END.

A PATH OF SLAUGHTERED DEMONS TRAILS UP THE DARK MOUNTAINSIDE. HOW LONG IT TOOK HIM, HE DOESN'T CARE. HE'S WHERE HE WANTS TO BE AND NOTHING WAS ABLE TO **PREVENT** THAT.

THE BLOOD-CLOAKED WARRIOR HAS WON, PASSING YET ANOTHER TEST.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN, DEVIL!

CREATION MEETS CREATOR. THIS OFFICIALLY SETS THE SCENE.

Contain your petty threats, Simmons. Ignorance does not befit your stature. You see, my child, though you were impressive in that little skirmish, you still grasp only a fraction of the truth about yourself.

I DON'T CARE!

Then do something about it.

BELIEVE ME, I **INTEND** TO.

'CAUSE YOU DON'T SCARE ME. KNOW WHY? THERE'S NOTHING LEFT FOR YOU TO TAKE. I'M EMPTY. DRAINED.

BUT I'LL NEVER BE YOUR SLAVE.

NEVER!

SUDDENLY, THE GROUND SHIFTS--

--AS A SICKLY CACKLE REVERBERATES THROUGH THE CORRIDORS OF HELL.

HAHAHAHA

Don't delude yourself, Simmons. It's far too late for you to attain inner peace.

You don't even know what you're fighting against, or why. How can you even hope to slay me when I'm not there...

...I'm here.

Or am I?

You've off-balance, Simmons... exactly where I want you to be: questioning your own sanity. What's this all about?

Well, let me enlighten you...

Machines like you are very rare -- built with just the right wiring. You could have been an instrument of God's elite. Instead, you pimped yourself--

--allowing others to trigger your senses. Manipulate your logic--

--just like I did. It's not about good or evil. Those are concepts created by man. Very limited.

Just like this version of Hell that surrounds you.

It appears as your subconscious believes it should. You humans have such narrow imaginations.

Sin. Evil. Terror. They wear many forms. So do their masters.

Shadows were created in Hell. Their tendrils encroach on God's light, and creep through to Earth.

How can you possibly kill that which is everywhere at once?

I live in all you see. In all shapes.

From the lowly insects.

To the beasts.

And, to the place that welcomes me most of all: the heart of man.

That's how I got you. Because your heart wanted me. Needed me. All that you've become has always been your choice.

You became a trained killer willingly, and I watched as you grew more and more efficient at it.

THEN TAKE ME. MY SOUL, WHATEVER THE HELL YOU WANT--

--JUST LEAVE MY WIFE ALONE. SHE'S NOT A PART OF THIS.

Unfortunately, she is.

And as for your soul, it's already mine... so you've nothing left to barter.

YES, I DO.

MY LOYALTY.

YOU DON'T CONTROL THAT. I'VE TAKEN YOUR POWERS, YOUR COSTUME, AND WHATEVER IT IS I'VE BECOME, BUT YOU STILL DON'T CONTROL ME.

YOU JUST OWN ME. THAT'S ALL. MY MIND'S STILL FREE, AND I REJECT ALL OF THIS. YOU'VE FAILED, MALEBOLGIA.

GOD'S LAUGHING AT YOU.

Listen here, worm! You're nothing! You were only reborn because I wanted it. Because I let you come back.

So, fine. Convince yourself that you're free. Play whatever mind games you need to. Because, believe me, I do control you.

Your emotions are mine. They're what Jason Wynn manipulated. He ordered you to commit atrocitities. You gave in.

If anyone should be laughing it's me, right in God's face. He lost His grip on one of His potential elite. And one day, you and he shall face each other as enemies.

That will lead to my victory.

You are becoming exactly what I intended. Your rage. Instincts. They're perfect. Your half-hearted rejection of these circumstances, all part of the process. To become my Grim Reaper. My messenger.

I've even given you a few more tools.*

The Visage of death.

The Black Heart of death.

And the Mark.

*THE LAST THREE ISSUES -- Tom.

Slowly, I've made you over, in my image--

-- transforming you into one of my greatest warriors. So, where there was failure we now find grandeur. Death now takes relentless strides. Return, my Hellspawn, to your beginnings.

The Earth needs you-- for, without an agent of Death, souls cannot be harvested.

And my army must grow.

As with your loyalty, I need your servitude. In time, that will come.

Let that time be now.

Be my executor. Work for me and I promise to leave your wife untouched.

Pure.

"Now go. Stimulate corruption in your wake. Enter the minds of men. Disrupt their dreams and spread my gospel."

EARTH. 2:54 A.M.

TERRY. I'M HERE.

WHO ARE YOU? TELL ME!

YOU ALREADY KNOW.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

LOOK AT ME. INTO MY EYES.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

"A DARKNESS OF SOME KIND."

NO!

YOU SEE ME. YOUR FRIEND.

LOOK AGAIN.

"MY GOD. IT'S TRUE."

YOU'RE BACK! ALIVE!

ALIVE!

...YOU'RE ALIVE...

TERRY FITZGERALD WILL SIT THERE, SHAKING, UNTIL THE SHADOWS WITHDRAW FROM DAWN'S LIGHT.

image

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McFARLANE BRIAN

EMBRACE IT, HE'D BEEN TOLD.

LET IT BATHE YOU IN ITS SEDUCTIVE CARESS.

ONLY THEN WILL YOUR EXISTENCE MATTER.

ONLY THEN WILL YOUR WIFE BE LEFT UNSCATHED.

SO DRINK IN MAN'S SINS...

...AND ALL HIS EVILS.

LET YOUR NEW OUTER FLESH GROW.

METAMORPHOSIZE.

ALLOWING YOU TO BECOME THAT WHICH YOU MUST:

A SERVANT OF HELL.

LIVING PURELY ON INSTINCTS.

WITH A CRAVING FOR BLOOD.

THE HELLSPAWN, A DWELLER IN THE **DARKEST** OF NEW YORK CITY'S ALLEYWAYS, HAS BEEN GATHERING THE LEAVINGS OF THE PAST WEEK'S ACTIVITIES.

VICTIMS OF RANDOM **MURDERS,** STILL UNSUSPECTED BY THE POLICE;

BODIES OF **ENEMIES** OF ORGANIZED CRIME, DUMPED BY ANONYMOUS HITMEN;

WHORES, KILLED AFTER THREATENING TO LEAVE THEIR PIMPS ONCE TOO OFTEN;

TOXICALLY OVERDOSED **DRUG ADDICTS;**

SAD, STARVED **DERELICTS;**

GANG MEMBERS A LONG WAY FROM HOME.

ALL MAKE THEIR WAY EVENTUALLY TO '**RAT CITY**'... OR AT LEAST THEIR **BODY PARTS** DO... EVEN THOUGH A CRIMSON SPECTRE HAS CLAIMED A PORTION OF IT FOR **HIMSELF.** NO MATTER. THE KILLINGS AND DUMPINGS CONTINUE.

THIS CLOAKED BEING, HIMSELF NO STRANGER TO EVIL'S BLACK EMBRACE, THEN GOES ABOUT COLLECTING THE **DEBRIS.**

SO THAT SHE WILL REMAIN UNTAINTED.

I CAN'T BE WRONG ABOUT THIS. THE DREAMS WERE SO VIVID.

HIS CORRUPTION. HER PURITY.

BUT IF IT IS HIM, WHERE'S HE BEEN ALL THESE YEARS? WHY'S HE HIDING?

AND WHY IN GOD'S NAME WOULD HE FAKE HIS OWN DEATH?

AND SO, IGNORANT OF SPAWN'S ORIGIN, TERRY'S MIND SPINS RELENTLESS-LY WITH QUESTIONS.

HERE THE SHADOWS KEEP THEIR SECRETS.

THEN, FOR SOME REASON, HE BECOMES ACUTELY AWARE OF HIS SUR-ROUNDINGS.

AS HE FORGES DEEP INTO THE LABYRINTHINE ALLEY, HIS ANXIETY BUILDS.

HE NEEDS A DISTRACTION.

SO, HE MAKES THAT WHICH HE FEARS INTO HIS TARGET.

MY GOD! LOOK AT THEM ALL. I CAN'T BELIEVE NONE OF THESE GUYS CAN GET A JOB, EVEN SCRUBBING FLOORS.

AT LEAST THEY'D HAVE SOME DIGNITY.

HE'S MORE COMFORTABLE NOW. FINDING FAULT IN OTHERS HAS ALWAYS GOTTEN US PAST OUR OWN INADEQUACIES.

MINUTES LATER, METHODIC FOOTSTEPS SHATTER TERRY'S BRIEF TRANQUILITY.

W-WHO'S THERE...!?

SHOW YOURSELF.

YOU'RE ON OUR TURF, HOMIE. WE DON'T LIKE 'REAL' PEOPLE MESSIN' WITH OUR SPACE.

SO YOU'D BETTER HAVE A DAMN GOOD REASON WHY I SHOULDN'T BUST YOUR HEAD OPEN.

I'M JUST TRYING TO FIND SOMEONE.

A FRIEND.

YOU AIN'T GOT NO FRIENDS AROUND HERE. PEOPLE COME HERE TRYING TO GET AWAY FROM CRAP LIKE YOU.

NOW PULL OUT YOUR WALLET AND FACE THE WALL.

TERRY CLOSES HIS EYES, THINKING HE'S ABOUT TO DIE.

BACK AWAY FROM HIM. YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT, GENTLE-MEN.

THE DIRECTIVE IS GIVEN WITH AN AUTHORITA-TIVE CALM.

I DON'T LIKE HIS STINK, *COG*. THIS PUNK THINKS HE'S TOO GOOD FOR US... DON'T YOU, BOY?

WE'RE JUST SCUM TO YOU, RIGHT?

LEAVE HIM WITH ME.

LIKE GOOD SOLDIERS, THE VAGRANT PAIR OBEYS. THEY'LL SEARCH FOR 'THE ENEMY' ELSEWHERE.

TH-THANKS, OLD TIMER. YOU SAVED MY...

WHY ARE YOU *HERE?*

uh?!

IT'S NOT WISE TO COME INTO THESE ALLEYS ALONE. ESPECIALLY AT *THIS* TIME.

YOU MUST NEED SOME-THING VERY IMPORTANT.

SPAWN.

I HEAR HE LIVES AROUND HERE. THOUGH EVERYONE I'VE ASKED THINKS HE'S SOME KIND OF GHOST. THAT HE'S NOT REAL.

NOW EITHER THEY'RE VERY IGNO-RANT *OR* THEY'RE HIDING SOMETHING. EITHER WAY, I'M GETTING NOWHERE.

WHAT'S YOUR INTEREST IN HIM?

LIKE I TOLD YOUR PALS, HE'S A FRIEND. OR, AT LEAST, HE USED TO BE.

A MOMENT.
SAM HAD TURNED HIS BACK FOR ONLY ONE FLEETING MOMENT.
SKCH SKRCH
CRIPES!
WHAT'D'YA THINK YOU'RE DOING?!
YOU CAN'T PUT YOUR NOTEPAD ON THE CAR LIKE THAT! WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO--SCRATCH IT? THAT'S A LACQUER FINISH. IT'S VERY DELICATE.
RUB RUB RUB RUB RUB RUB RUB
SORRY. DIDN'T MEAN TO DENIGRATE THE CRIMEMOBILE, SIR.
JUST THINK IT THROUGH NEXT TIME.
I'LL BE MORE CARE-FUL.
CLINK
SPK
I WON'T EVEN ASK.
C'MON, TWITCH. IT'S JUST A FEW WRAPPERS.
BESIDES, EVERY-ONE KNOWS IT'S THE EXTERIOR THAT COUNTS, NOT THE INSIDE.
ESPECIALLY FOR THE CHICKS.
I'LL KEEP THAT IN MIND, SIR.

LATER THAT NIGHT...

SO WHERE IS HE, TWITCH?

I DON'T KNOW. BUT HE SAID HE'D BE HERE.

YEAH, JUST LIKE *LAST* TIME. I TELL YOU, I'M NOT GETTING STOOD UP A *SECOND* TIME.

EVEN IF HE *DOES* SHOW UP, I'M ONLY GIVING HIM FIVE MINUTES TO PROVE HE'S LEGIT ABOUT THIS CHIEF BANKS–SENATOR JENNINGS CONSPIRACY.

AGREED. BUT IF OUR SUSPICIONS ARE CORRECT, THIS GUY IS SOME HIGH-RANKING GOVERNMENT TYPE WHO SEEMS TO KNOW WHO'S PULLING SOME BIG INTERNATIONAL STRINGS.

IT'D GIVE OUR AGENCY INSTANT CREDIBILITY IF WE CAN PIECE THIS CASE TOGETHER.

I DON'T LIKE BEING USED.

CAN YOU IMAGINE, TWITCH, WHAT KIND OF *POWER* THIS MYSTERY LEADER MUST WIELD IF HE COULD MAKE BANKS BLOW HIS OWN HEAD OFF?

"THAT *IS* A CONCERN, SIR."

IN SPORADIC GUSTS, STARK WINDS SNAKE THROUGH INTRICATE BRANCHES OF THE HIDDEN BOWERY--

--WINDS CHANNELED TO FAN AN OPEN FIRE, STOKED WELL TO CONSUME THE TRINKETS WHICH BIND AN AURA OF **UGLINESS** TO THOSE DWELLING IN THE BACK STREETS.

--SEEMINGLY SUCKED INTO THE DARKNESS BY AN UNSEEN FORCE--

MONEY. STOLEN GOODS. DRUGS. THE LIFEBLOOD OF ANY CORRUPTED SUB-CULTURE.

THESE ARE THE WORTHLESS OBJECTS THAT HAVE DRAWN THEM ALL TO THEIR FATE--

--MADE THEM BEACONS TO THE CREATURE CLOAKED IN BLOOD RED.

GOD HAVE MERCY.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, AL?

COGLIOSTRO, THE OLD MAN, HAD POINTED TERRY IN THE DIRECTION HE NEEDED TO GO.

BEFORE MELTING INTO THE ICY GRIP OF NIGHT, HE GAVE A WARNING:

"**FOCUS** YOURSELF. DISTRACTIONS ARE A LURE FOR THE **WEAK**."

TERRY ACKNOW-LEDGES HIS WEAKNESS.

NOTHING ON HIS TWELVE-BLOCK TREK HAD PREPARED HIM FOR **THIS** HELLISH SETTING.

OR FOR WHAT HE HAS NOW BECOME.

GET OUT OF HERE.

NOW.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? I NEED TO KNOW. I NEED TO UNDER-STAND.

IS IT REALLY *YOU*, AL?

HE WANTS TO RUN. TO **END** THIS NIGHTMARE. BUT COGLIOSTRO'S WORDS STILL RING IN HIS BRAIN.

NO! I'M *TIRED* OF ALL THIS. I *HAVE* TO *KNOW*.

WHAT'S THIS *ABOUT*? WHAT *ARE* YOU, SOME MURDERING *LUNATIC*?!

KLANK

THAP

WITH UNHUMAN SWIFTNESS, THE CREATURE REACTS. TERRY NEARLY BLACKS OUT FROM THE IMPACT.

YOU STOLE MY WIFE, GOD DAMN YOU! MY WIFE!

SHE THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD! DON'T YOU *UNDER-STAND?* WANDA THOUGHT YOU WERE GONE. *FOREVER.* WE *ALL* DID.

IT'S BEEN *FIVE YEARS!*

SO THAT GIVES YOU THE RIGHT TO SCREW MY WIFE?!

C-CAN'T YOU *HEAR?* *SHE BURIED YOU.* WATCHED THEM PUT YOU *IN THE GROUND.* IT *DEVASTATED* HER, LOSING YOU. SHE WAS IN *PAIN.* SHE NEEDED TO GET *THROUGH* IT.

I WAS TRYING TO DO WHAT I THOUGHT YOU'D *WANT* FROM ME. *FALLING IN LOVE* WASN'T PART OF THE *PLAN.*

THEN WHAT **WAS?** HAVING ME **KILLED?** WHY DID WYNN GIVE THE ORDER TO **TERMINATE** ME? YOU **WERE** MY FRIEND, GODDAMIT. NOW, YOU'RE **DEFENDING** THAT SONOVABITCH.

FIRST MY LIFE! THEN **WANDA!** I SHOULD KILL YOU RIGHT NOW!

YOU'RE *WRONG!* YOUR DYING HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH WANDA. SHE'S INNOCENT OF ALL THIS... YOU, WYNN, MY FRAME-UP... IT'S *DESTROYING* HER.

HE'S RIGHT, AL.

THIS IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, COG. SO GET THE HELL **OUT** OF HERE.

I WILL. WHEN I'M READY.

THIS MAN USED TO BE A FRIEND OF YOURS. BEFORE YOU DIED. BEFORE YOU ***CHANGED***. HE'S JUST A VICTIM, AL.

AND IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF YOU. YOUR ***ACTIONS***. HE'S NOW LIVING A LIE HOPING THAT SOME DAY HE'LL FIND THE ***TRUTH***.

YOU DON'T KNOW US, COG. OR WHAT THIS IS ABOUT.

BUT *HE DOES.*

SO ASK HIM. ***THEN*** DO YOUR KILLING.

SOMETHING YOU SEEM TO HAVE A HARD TIME ACCEPTING THESE DAYS.

ASK!

I DON'T HAVE TO-- BECAUSE THERE ISN'T AN ANSWER **GOOD** ENOUGH!

NOTHING'S GOING TO EXCUSE HIS BETRAYAL--OR WHAT HE TOOK FROM ME!

LOOK AT ME, TERRY. LOOK WHAT YOU HELPED HELL TO CREATE!

A **MONSTER!**

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT **MEANS?!** TO NOT BE A MAN ANYMORE. TO BE SO DISGUSTING TO LOOK AT THAT **MY OWN WIFE** DOESN'T RECOGNIZE ME!

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?! WHAT IT'S **LIKE** TO HAVE YOUR WIFE RECOIL IN FEAR AT THE MERE SIGHT OF YOU?

TO KNOW SHE'S SLEEPING NAKED NEXT TO ANOTHER MAN?

I'VE **WATCHED** YOU, TERRY. SEEN HOW WANDA **LOVES** YOU. THE WAY SHE **LOOKS** AT YOU.

THAT SHOULD BE ME! NOT YOU, DAMMIT! ME!!

YOU'VE GOT EVERYTHING. HER LOVE. HER DEVOTION. HER CHILD! I'VE GOT NOTHING!

I DID!!

CAN'T YOU SEE?! I'M LIKE THIS BECAUSE I'M DEAD! HE USED ME! AND MY LOVE FOR WANDA. TURNED IT ALL INTO SOME WAKING NIGHTMARE.

SHE TH- THOUGHT YOU'D DIED...

HELL AND ITS DEVILS MOCK ALL WE HOLD DEAR. HUMANS ARE A COMMODITY, LURED INTO DAMNATION BY THEIR OWN WEAKNESS.

THEY FOUND MINE-- WANDA. NOW, TO KEEP HER PURE, I HAVE TO BE THEIR ASSASSIN. A KILLER FOR THEIR UNHOLY WAR.

FUNNY, ISN'T IT? I'M DOING THE SAME JOB FOR HELL THAT I DID FOR WYNN. AND NOW YOU DEFEND HIM.

NEEDING ANSWERS, SPAWN RELEASES HIS GRIP.

WHY, TERRY? HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY JUSTIFY YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH WYNN?

HE SET ME UP, AL. *FRAMED* ME. I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW OR EVEN *WHY*. BUT IT WAS WYNN.

AND THE ONLY WAY I COULD THINK TO NAIL HIM WAS TO GET CLOSE-- WATCH HIM MYSELF AND HOPE HE TRIPPED UP SOMEPLACE. SO I TOOK A JOB WITH HIM. NOT TO BE HIS CONFIDANT. OR HIS ADVISOR. OR HIS SHIELD.

I TOOK THE JOB SO I COULD *BURY* THE SCUMBAG. PURE AND SIMPLE.

SINCE WHEN DID YOU BECOME SUCH A TOUGH GUY?

LOOK! YOU KEEP TALKING ABOUT *YOUR* DEVILS. WELL, I'VE GOT ONE TOO, ONLY *MINE'S* IN *HUMAN* FORM.

AND HE'S *MESSING* WITH *MY FAMILY.*

I CAN'T... I ***WON'T...*** TURN A BLIND EYE TO WHAT HE DID.

SO WHY ARE YOU HERE?

I CAN'T DO THIS ALONE. I'M LOOKING FOR SOME HELP.

AND WHY SHOULD HE? THIS ISN'T EVEN HIS FAULT, AL, IT'S ***YOURS***.

WHEN YOU STOLE THOSE ***GUNS*** MONTHS AGO,* IT SET IN MOTION A WHOLE CHAIN OF EVENTS THAT LED WYNN TO BELIEVE YOUR ***FRIEND*** WAS RESPONSIBLE. THE LOSS OF THOSE ARMAMENTS CAUSED YOUR FORMER BOSS A GREAT DEAL OF DISCOMFORT INTERNATIONALLY.

PEOPLE IN POWER DON'T LIKE BEING MADE FOOLS OF. GIVEN THE SHORT LIST OF PEOPLE WHO KNEW OF THE WEAPONS, WYNN CONCLUDED IT HAD TO BE TERRY.

*ISSUE 7 -- Tom.

AFTER ALL, WHY WOULD ANYONE ASSUME A ***DEADMAN*** HAD DONE IT?

THEN PROVE IT. I'LL BE AT YOUR OFFICE LATE TOMORROW.

HOW? THERE'S CODE ELEVEN SECURITY IN EFFECT.

JUST BE THERE.

IN SAN FRANCISCO, THE DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY HAS ARRESTED A PAIR OF MAJOR COCAINE IMPORTERS. NORVIN BLANDON AND DANILO MENESES, TWO COLUMBIAN NATIONALS, ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE DISTRIBUTED SEVERAL TONS OF COCAINE THROUGH BAY AREA STREET GANGS.

PROFITS ARE ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN FUNNELLED TO A GUERILLA ARMY WHOSE LEADERS WERE GRADUATES OF THE C.I.A.-RUN "SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS." BOTH MENESES AND BLANDON HAD BEEN EMPLOYED BY THE C.I.A. AS CIVILIAN LEADERS OF ANTI-COMMUNIST MILITIAS. THE HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE IS INVESTIGATING ANY POSSIBLE LINKS THERE, AS WELL AS WITH PARAMILITARY GROUPS IN TURKEY AND IRELAND, ACCORDING TO AN UNNAMED STATE DEPARTMENT SOURCE.

THE PAIR HAD FALLEN INTO DISFAVOR WITH THEIR COLUMBIAN SUPPLIERS OVER UNPAID DEBTS, ACCORDING TO THE SAME SOURCE.

NOTED DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER DUNCAN LEVIN, JUST BACK FROM NORTHERN IRELAND, IS FURIOUS WITH THE ***EMBASSY*** THERE. HIS FILM CREW, PERMITS IN HAND, WERE DENIED ACCESS TO A REMOTE VILLAGE NEAR THE CITY OF HEMTORG. AS THEY PRESSED THE ISSUE, THEY WERE ***'REMOVED'*** BY LOCALS. WHEN LEVIN BROUGHT THE MATTER TO THE EMBASSY, THE U.S. AMBASSADOR SUPPORTED THE ACTIONS OF THE LOCALS.

LEVIN SUSPECTS THE EMBASSY WAS PRESSURED BY THE C.I.A. DUE TO REBEL ACTIVITY IN THE AREA. THIS IS BORNE OUT BY EMBASSY RECOMMENDATIONS THAT, "FOR POLITICAL REASONS," THE PROJECT BE "REWORKED" FOR FILMING IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY.

ON A SADDER NOTE, I REGRET TO REPORT THE DEATH OF HAROLD CASE, A VETERAN INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER WITH NBC. HE WAS ON SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT IN ISTANBUL WHEN HE DIED IN A TRAGIC ***CAR ACCIDENT.*** HE WAS 61.

REGULAR VIEWERS KNOW MY FEELINGS ABOUT THE C.I.A. -- HOW I'VE BEGGED AND ***PLEADED*** WITH OUR GOVERNMENT TO PUT A LEASH ON THEM. THE AGENCY'S BLATANT MANIPULATION OF OUR OVERSEAS INTERESTS WILL HAVE REPERCUSSIONS WELL INTO OUR ***GRANDKIDS'*** LIFETIMES, ASSUMING THEY LIVE SO LONG AND EVEN HEAR ABOUT IT. THE ***BIGGEST*** CRISIS OF ALL IS THAT OUR EVER-DWINDLING CABAL OF ***MEDIA OUTLETS*** FOLLOWS THEIR LEAD IN THE SHIFTING PRIORITIES OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING.

IN OTHER WORDS, ***OUR SPIES KEEP SWITCHING ENEMIES.*** IT'S AS THOUGH THEY'RE BEING LED BY A RING THROUGH THEIR SPECIAL INTERESTS. POLITICAL? MILITARY? WHAT DAY IS THIS?

IT'S BAD ***ENOUGH*** THAT NATIONAL SECRETS ARE BEING BOUGHT AND SOLD LIKE SOME CHEAP WATCH IN A PAWN SHOP. MY PROBLEM IS THAT THE PAWN SHOP KEEPS ***CHANGING MANAGEMENT.***

LOOK, I'M SORRY THINGS DIDN'T WORK OUT LIKE THEY SHOULD HAVE, BUT THEY NEEDED ME TO FINISH UP AN ANALYSIS I'VE BEEN WORKING ON.

TELL GRANNY I'LL SEE HER NEXT WEEK.

IT'S NOT HER I'M CONCERNED WITH. IT'S YOU, AND YOUR LONG HOURS.

I'LL BE FINE. AS SOON AS I CAN I'LL BE OUT OF HERE, OKAY.

YEAH, OKAY.

I LOVE YOU, WANDA.

I LOVE YOU, TOO.

SMALL LIES ARE WHAT HE GIVES HER, NOT YET READY TO TELL HER THE TRUTH FOR FEAR IT MIGHT HURT HER.

C'MON, AL, WHERE ARE YOU?

TIME SLIPS AWAY AS TERRY CONTINUES TO ORGANIZE HIS EVIDENCE.

JESUS! HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN HERE? HOW'D YOU GET *IN*?

IT DOESN'T MATTER. SHOW ME WHAT YOU NEED TO.

THUD

uh?

IT'S RIGHT HERE. THE DATA'S CROSS-REFERENCED, TRACKING WEAPONS CONSIGNMENTS THAT'VE DISAPPEARED OUT- OR HAVE BEEN RECEIVED OVERSEAS AT LOCATIONS OTHER THAN WHERE THEY WERE INVOICED.

IRAQ. NORTH KOREA. BOSNIA. YOU NAME IT. SECURITY BREACHES THAT ENABLE POLITICAL FAVORS TO BE BOUGHT. REROUTED ***GUN SHIPMENTS*** ARE THE PAYOFF.

TAKE A LOOK YOURSELF.

HE DOES. THE INFORMATION BUILDS A DAMNING CASE.

SO YOU THINK IT'S WYNN?

PRETTY SURE. I WON'T BE CERTAIN UNTIL SOMEONE I.D.'s THE WEAPONS.

WHICH IS WHERE I COME IN.

YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE SKILLED ENOUGH TO ATTEMPT THE MISSION. AND, WITH YOUR POWERS, THE CHANCE OF SURVIVAL INCREASES DRAMATICALLY.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, I NEED TO ASK YOU SOMETHING. IT WAS ***YOU*** WHO CURED MY CANCER,* WASN'T IT? WELL, ***WHY,*** SINCE YOU WANTED TO ***KILL ME*** SO BAD?

I HAD MY REASONS.

*ISSUE 50--Tom.

IT WAS WANDA, WASN'T IT? WELL, WE NEED... *SHE* NEEDS YOUR HELP.

SHE WANTS WYNN BURIED AS MUCH AS I DO.

SO WILL YOU DO IT?

PLEASE.

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SPAWN®

SURREAL.

IT'S THE ONLY WORD TERRY CAN THINK OF TO DESCRIBE THIS MOMENT...

...AS HE FINDS HIMSELF CAUGHT IN THE WORLD OF A FRIEND HE'D THOUGHT HAD BEEN **BURIED** YEARS AGO.

JOY. RELIEF. HORROR. WHAT **SHOULD** HE BE FEELING? THE EMOTIONS RICOCHET AS EACH QUESTION IS SILENTLY ASKED.

WHY DOES HE LIVE HERE LIKE THIS?

WHERE'S HE BEEN **HIDING** ALL THESE YEARS?

WHAT IS THIS **ABOUT?**

ACCORDING TO THIS DATA, WYNN'S TAKEN THE PROFITS FROM SALES OF THE ARMAMENT SHIPMENTS HE'S DIVERTED AND USED THE MONEY TO BUY POLITICAL FAVORS.

NOW THAT HIS FRIEND IS BACK IN HIS LIFE, HOW DOES TERRY CONVINCE HIMSELF THAT ALL THIS UGLINESS IS ACCEPTABLE?

LOOK AT THIS PLACE!

IT'S A FRIGGIN' *HORROR* SHOW.

AND WORSE, AL'S BEEN *THRIVING* IN THIS.

HE'S IN **IRAQ**, TOO?! THAT COUNTRY USED TO **HATE** HIM.

HE'S *CHANGED*. AND UNTIL I FIGURE OUT HOW *MUCH*, THERE'S NO WAY I CAN LET WANDA KNOW ABOUT *ANY* OF THIS.

IT'D *DESTROY* HER.

THE LAST TIME THEY MET, SHE BECAME CONVINCED HE'S SOME PSYCHOTIC *NUT* TRYING TO MOCK AL'S MEMORY. *

TEK TEK TEK

*ISSUE 36 -- Tom.

*SPAWN CONTINUES SCANNING THE LAPTOP'S SCREEN, SEARCHING FOR A WEAK LINK IN HIS FORMER BOSS'S OVERSEAS DEALINGS.

TEK TEK

*TERRY, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS BEEN SO ENGROSSED WITH THE MACABRE **SETTING** THAT HE HASN'T WATCHED WHERE HE'S **STEPPING**.

*A SQUISHY **OOZE** CHANGES THAT.

WHAT THE--?!

WORMS. MOVING WITH A PURPOSE AND SWIFTNESS THAT REMINDS TERRY OF HOW ANTS BEHAVE.

ONE LEG IS HALF COVERED BEFORE HE KNOWS IT.

THEY'RE BRUSHED OFF. FRANTICALLY.

WHAT'S IN THIS GARBAGE THEY'RE SO EAGER FOR?

GOD.

THERE'S THOUSANDS.

DROP THEM!

DON'T YOU EVER TOUCH THOSE AGAIN! UNDERSTAND?

DO YOU UNDER-STAND?!

C'MON, TAKE IT EASY, AL.

THERE ARE THINGS YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW ABOUT.

THINGS THAT SPAWN KNOWS TOO WELL.

LIKE THE **WORMS**: THE **CHANNELERS OF EVIL**. THEIR LIVES IN THE SOIL, UNTOUCHED BY GOD'S LIGHT, CREATE IN THEM AN ETHEREAL GAP **EAGERLY** FILLED BY THE POWERS OF **DARKNESS**. THEIR **BLACK AURA** HELPS NURTURE AND STRENGTHEN SPAWN'S UNIFORM.

AND THOUGH HE TRIES NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT, HE KNOWS THEY'VE BECOME A PART OF HIS NEW EXISTENCE.

LOOK, TERRY, I SAID I'D **WORK** WITH YOU. BUT, AT LEAST FOR NOW, ALL THIS IS GOING TO BE **AWKWARD**. FOR **BOTH** OF US.

SO LET'S STAY FOCUSED ON **WYNN** AND DETERMINE HOW WE BRING HIM TO HIS **KNEES**, AND HIS **EMPIRE** TO **RUIN**.

I AGREE.

BUT I'M STILL TRYING TO GET A HANDLE ON ALL THIS. LIKE THAT OLD MAN-- I THINK YOU CALLED HIM 'COG'. SOMEHOW HE KNEW ABOUT MY *LIFE*, MY *MOTIVATIONS.** *HOW?*

ONLY SOMEONE FROM MY OFFICE COULD KNOW WHAT HE KNOWS. AND DON'T TELL ME HE'S SOME UNDERCOVER GUY.

*LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

I DON'T **KNOW** WHAT HE IS. BUT HE'S GOT SOME KIND OF POWER THAT GIVES HIM INSIGHT INTO OTHERS. UNFORTUNATELY, HE'S NEVER BOTHERED TO TELL ME HOW IT WORKS.

IT JUST **DOES.**

IN THE MEANTIME, YOU WANT TO BE USEFUL? HELP ME FIND MY GUNS. I BURIED THEM **SOMEWHERE** AROUND HERE.

YEAH, OKAY.

YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT THIS, FINE. IT'S JUST HARD FOR ME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S ***HAPPENED*** TO YOU. YOU'RE BIGGER. ***TALLER*** THAN BEFORE.

WITH ***POWER*** FROM ***WHO*** KNOWS WHERE. AND AFTER ***FIVE YEARS*** YOU JUST DECIDED TO POP ***BACK*** INTO EVERYONE'S LIVES.

WHY?

WAS DISAPPEAR-ANCE YOUR ONLY OPTION? FAKING YOUR OWN DEATH... MAKING WANDA SUFFER...

I'M DEAD!

OR, AT LEAST, I **WAS.** THE FASTER YOU ACCEPT **THAT** THE SOONER SOME OF THIS WILL BEGIN TO MAKE SENSE.

HELL'S **NOT** PLAYING A **GAME**, TERRY. THEY **KNEW** WHAT THEY WERE DOING TO ME.

MY **TRUE** BODY IS STILL LYING IN A COFFIN. ROTTING AWAY. **THIS** IS WHAT I'VE BECOME SINCE:

A WALKING GRIM REAPER!

SO DON'T TELL ME HOW WANDA HAS SUFFERED. I KNOW **THAT.** **BELIEVE** ME, THAT THOUGHT TORTURES ME EVERY **MINUTE.**

IF YOU THINK YOU'RE CONFUSED, WELL, JOIN THE CLUB.

SENSING THAT THEIR NEW-FOUND RELATIONSHIP HAS POINTS YET TO RESOLVE, THEY AGREE TO RECONVENE ANOTHER NIGHT.

AS TERRY AMBLES FORWARD, HE **KNOWS** HE'S MADE A MISTAKE. PRESSURING AL THIS SOON ISN'T FAIR. HE'LL TALK WHEN HE'S READY.

THE FOCUS SHOULD BE ON JASON WYNN. ALL THE REST WILL TAKE CARE OF ITSELF.

LIKE THE MATTER OF TERRY'S **SAFETY**, IN **OR** OUT OF THE BOWERY.

... THEIR IGNORANCE CAUSING SOME FRICTION IN THE RANKS.

THEY ARE DEALT WITH, THOUGH, BY THOSE WHO KNOW BETTER:

THAT THIS MAN IS NOW TO BE GIVEN ALL RIGHTS ACCORDED ONE KNOWN AS A 'FRIEND OF SPAWN'.

SO TERRY LEAVES. UNTOUCHED. AND COMPLETELY UNAWARE.

THAT'S BEEN TENDED TO. THE WORD HAS BEEN SPREAD, "THIS CIVILIAN GOES UN-TOUCHED." OF COURSE, THERE ARE NEW ARRIVALS DAILY...

KNOWN FOR ITS ELITE CLIENTELE, THE CHATEAU LAURIER CATERS TO THOSE PROFESSIONALS SEEKING FINE FRENCH CUISINE AND A STAFF DISCREET ENOUGH TO IGNORE EVERY CONVERSATION.

... LEAVING MY *DEAR* RIVALS TO THE NORTH PONDERING THEIR NEXT MOVE.

I'M GLAD I WAS ABLE TO BE OF SOME ASSISTANCE.

STILL, ONE CANNOT HAVE TOO *MANY* FRIENDS.

OH Mr. WYNN, YOU ARE *FAR* TOO MODEST. YOUR SKILL AT ACQUIRING THE APPROPRIATE HARDWARE FOR THOSE OF US IN *NEED* HAS EARNED YOU MY *UNDYING* GRATITUDE.

WHICH IS WHY I'VE ASKED *Mr. IJANNA* HERE TO *JOIN* US THIS EVENING.

HIS ARMIES ARE *STRATEGICALLY* PLACED *THROUGHOUT* THE CZECH REPUBLIC *AND* ALONG THE TURKISH BORDER. THOUGH *SMALL* IN SIZE, THEY'VE--

I'M WELL AWARE OF Mr. IJANNA'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN GUERILLA WARFARE -- OF HOW HE'S ABLE TO DO SO MUCH WITH SO LITTLE.

MY SOURCES ALSO INFORM ME THAT YOU GENTLEMEN HAVE NOW DISCOVERED A *COMMON* ENEMY-- ONE WHO CURRENTLY HOLDS A VITAL POLITICAL STRONGHOLD NEAR MUCH-NEEDED OIL FIELDS.

AGAIN YOU IMPRESS ME, Mr. WYNN.

WE ARE PREPARED TO PAY HANDSOMELY FOR ASSURANCES THAT OUR CAUSE WILL BE FORTIFIED WITH THE PROPER 'TOOLS'.

I WILL CONSIDER THIS TO BE A PERSONAL FAVOR, SIR. AS PER YOUR REQUEST, ALL FUNDS WILL BE CAREFULLY ROUTED TO A NUMBERED ACCOUNT IN SWITZERLAND.

TO FURTHER SHOW MY GRATITUDE, MAY I MENTION THAT I HAVE FRIENDS IN THE *IRISH* GOVERNMENT WHO CAN HELP WITH YOUR LITTLE PROBLEMS THERE.

FORTY MINUTES LATER, THE DEAL IS CLOSED.

*THOUGH ALL ARE DISTRUSTFUL OF EACH OTHER, THIS MAKES FOR GOOD BUSINESS. **ESPECIALLY** FOR JASON WYNN. THE PROFITS FROM THIS TRANSACTION WILL HELP HIM BUY FAVORS IN JAPAN TOMORROW.*

A LITTLE BUBBLY FOR SUCH A *SPECIAL* OCCASION?

EXCUSE ME?!

SURPRISE!

I'LL *TELL* YOU, THAT *WAS* SWEET. YOU CONTROL *THEM*. THEY CONTROL *YOU*. EVERYONE'S ALL KISSY-KISSY. AND I THOUGHT WE ***DEMONS*** WERE MANIPULATIVE.

YOU'RE STILL ON TRACK WITH *OUR* DEAL, hmm?

SPAWN WILL BE DEALT WITH SOON ENOUGH.

SOMEWHERE OVER A MILITARY INSTALLATION NEAR CAČAK, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA...

THE FIRST TARGET HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED. AFTER MUCH DISCUSSION, AL AND TERRY HAD CONCLUDED THAT **VISUAL CONFIRMATION** WAS A CRUCIAL STEP IN THE EXECUTION OF THIS MISSION.

HIS RIDE HAS TAKEN ALMOST EIGHTEEN HOURS.

SITTING NEXT TO LANDING GEAR AT 30,000 FEET FOR OVER HALF A DAY CAUSED SOME PAIN.

BUT IN THE PROCESS, USE OF HIS **POWERS** WAS NOT NECESSARY.

A SATELLITE POSITIONING LINK GIVES HIM HIS LOCATION.

AND THEN, WHEN THE PROPER TIME COMES, A SMALL PANEL IS RIPPED FROM THE PLANE'S GREAT BELLY.

ANOTHER 10 HOUR WALK BRINGS HIM TO WHERE HE WANTS TO BE.

POPPA ONE, THIS IS BIRTHDAY BOY. I CAN SEE MY PRESENT.

6:7:1:2

NEW YORK CITY.

COPY, BIRTHDAY BOY. IT'S TIME TO OPEN YOUR PRESENT AND TELL ME WHAT'S INSIDE.

I'M ESPECIALLY CURIOUS TO SEE IF IT'S BEEN MADE IN THE U.S., SINCE IT'S NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND THOSE KINDS OF TOYS IN OTHER COUNTRIES.

I'LL SEND A MESSAGE AFTER EVERYTHING'S BEEN UNWRAPPED.

HOW LONG WILL THAT BE?

TWENTY MINUTES, TOPS. I DON'T SEE THIS PARTY LASTING VERY LONG.

"BE CAREFUL."

BENEATH HIS MASK, SPAWN SMILES, THINKING THAT TERRY ALWAYS WAS SUCH A WORRY-WART.

BUT THIS IS THE TYPE OF MISSION HE WAS TRAINED FOR.

PERHAPS EVEN **BORN** FOR.

WHY ELSE WOULD HE HAVE BEEN SO EFFECTIVE IN THEIR EXECUTION.

AS A **MAN**, THEN, HIS SUCCESS IN THIS MISSION WAS HIGHLY PROBABLE.

AS A HELLSPAWN, IT'S A LOCK.

HIS NEW POWERS ONLY **ENHANCE** THE KILLING SKILLS OF A FORMER ELITE SOLDIER.

THAT THIS INSTALLATION HOUSES THE BUTCHERS WHO, 48 HOURS EARLIER RAVAGED A SMALL VILLAGE 90 MILES TO THE NORTH...

...SLAUGHTER-ING MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN ALIKE...

... ONLY SERVES TO MAKE OUR CLOAKED HERO MORE DETERMINED.

MORE BRUTAL.

HE WAS TAUGHT HOW TO SHATTER BONES. SHRED CARTILAGE. DAMAGE VITAL ORGANS.

AND THE WAY HE TOOK TO WEAPONS-- **ANY** WEAPONS-- INCREASED HIS VALUE TO HIS SUPERIORS.

"KILL OR BE KILLED." THAT WAS WYNN'S MOTTO.

Lt. COLONEL AL SIMMONS WAS HIS PRIZE AGENT FOR ENFORCING IT.

THAT WAS THEN. **THIS** IS **NOW.**

THOUGH NOTHING MUCH HAS CHANGED.

HE'S STILL A PUPPET. IT'S JUST SOMEONE ELSE'S WAR.

HELL'S.

STILL, IN SOME WARPED SENSE OF LOGIC, THIS IS A CHANCE FOR SPAWN TO FEEL **HUMAN** AGAIN.

DOING WHAT MADE HIM **SPECIAL**.

AND, FOR MAY-BE THE FIRST TIME, FINDING A PURPOSE FOR HIS TRANSFORMED, **ACCURSED** LIFE.

HE NEEDS TO SAVOR THE MOMENT.

BIRTHDAY BOY, DO YOU READ?

COPY, POPPA ONE. I'M STILL HERE.

GOOD. I NEED YOU TO LOOK AROUND FURTHER. SEE IF YOU CAN FIND THE *SPECIAL* PRESENT.

NEGATIVE. I'VE SEARCHED THIS PLACE **TWICE** ALREADY. THE TAGS ARE ALL **CORRECT.**

00:00:51:20

WHAT?

I'M TELLING YOU WE'VE BEEN **SUCKERED.** ALL SHIPMENTS APPEAR... **WAIT** A MINUTE!

DO YOU SEE SOME-THING?

I'M NOT SURE. I'LL TELL YOU IN A SECOND.

GRENADES

KRONOS

HE GUESSED RIGHT. THE STANDARD CRATE OF GRENADES IS **HALF** THIS SIZE, **PARTICULARLY** IF THEY WERE MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES.

WHY WOULD SOMEONE GO TO THE TROUBLE OF PUTTING THEM IN OVERSIZE BOXES?

...UNLESS IT HAD NOTHING TO **DO** WITH GRENADES. SO, THE **MARKINGS** HAD TO BE FALSE.

POPPA ONE, WE'VE JUST HIT PAY DIRT! PHYSICAL IDENTIFICATION **CONFIRMED.**

THANK GOD. OKAY, YOU'VE BEEN A ***VERY*** GOOD BOY. NOW GET THE HELL ***OUT*** OF THERE. ***PRONTO!***

I WILL. BUT NOT 'TIL I LEAVE A LITTLE GOING-AWAY CARD.

WHAT'RE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT? YOUR MISSION'S *COMPLETE*. YOU JUST NEED TO GET *OUT*.

00:50

DO YOU COPY! THERE'S NO *TIME* FOR VENDETTAS. WE *HAVE* WHAT WE CAME FOR.

NO FURTHER RESPONSE IS FORTHCOMING.

I GIVE UP.

BRTTT

BRTT RTTT

QUICKLY... VERY QUICKLY... SPAWN IS REMINDED THAT A GOOD SOLDIER DOESN'T VEER FROM HIS ORDERS.

ANY DELAY HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE DEADLY.

BUT HE HAS TO DO THIS.

00:20

IT'S NOT ABOUT STRATEGY ANY-MORE. THE GAME IS QUITE SIMPLE NOW:

REVENGE.

JASON WYNN IS ABOUT TO RECEIVE A VERY LOUD MESSAGE:

HELLSPAWN DON'T LIKE BEING PUSHED.

FOR NEARLY THIRTY MILES, THE FORCE OF THE BLAST WILL BE VISIBLE.

...SOURCES IN THE VICINITY OF THE EXPLOSION SAID THAT BECAUSE OF A SECOND TIER ENFORCEMENT RING AROUND THE INSTALLATION, FIREFIGHTERS WERE UNABLE TO MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE DISASTER SITE IN A TIMELY FASHION. WHEN RESCUE UNITS DID FINALLY ARRIVE, THE RAGING FIRES HAD DAMAGED THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE REBEL BASE.

ONE INSIDER PREDICTED THAT WITHOUT SUPPORT FROM ITS SOUTHERN FLANK, THE RENEGADE ARMIES RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH OF NORTH KOREA'S TERRORIST ACTIVITY WOULD HAVE TO REALIGN ITS FORCE. THIS MIGHT GIVE GOVERNMENT PEACE NEGOTIATORS A CHANCE TO CONTINUE DISCUSSIONS TOWARD A CEASE-FIRE.

...THOUGH IT WAS ASSUMED THE LATEST EXPLOSION WOULD ESCALATE TENSIONS. THE HEADS OF BOTH PARTIES HAVE GONE INTO HIDING, PERHAPS TO FORMULATE PLANS FOR A ***RESOLUTION*** TO THIS LONG-STANDING FEUD. BOTH THE NORTH AND SOUTH KOREAN GOVERNMENTS HAVE INCREASED SECURITY IN RURAL BORDER AREAS ESPECIALLY. THEY HOPE TO THWART FURTHER MILITIA ACTIVITY IN THE EVENT NEITHER SIDE AGREES TO MUTUALLY-IMPLEMENTED SANCTIONS.

WE HAVE LEARNED THAT ONE REBEL COMMANDER IN THE NORTH HAS BEEN ***EXECUTED*** FOR ALLOWING SUCH A DEVASTATING INCIDENT TO OCCUR. THE BODY OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL SANHO KIM WAS REPORTEDLY HOIST UP A POLE AS A WARNING THAT FAILURE FROM WITHIN WOULD NO LONGER BE ***TOLERATED.***

SO GET ***THIS!...*** AS A RESULT OF THIS LITTLE ASIAN ***BONFIRE,*** OUR PRESIDENT'S STAFF IS BEING LOBBIED FROM ALL SIDES BY OUR ALLIES. ***THEY*** WANT TO ***TAKE ADVANTAGE*** OF THE NORTH KOREANS' WEAKENED POSITION BY STEPPING UP ***OUR*** SIDE'S MILITARY PRESENCE. BUT US PEACE-LOVING AMERICANS ARE INSISTING ON STANDING IDLY ***BY*** AS NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA DUKE IT OUT.

SO OKAY, OUR FINE NATION IS BEING ***HYPOCRITICAL*** AGAIN, BUT THE RUMBLINGS FROM ***OUR*** LOCAL MILITIAS SUGGEST IT MAY JUST BE BUSINESS AS USUAL. I GUESS I WASN'T THE ***ONLY*** ONE WHO LOOKED CLOSE AT THE VIDEO FOOTAGE. THESE SO-CALLED ***REBELS*** WERE CARRYING OUR LATEST ***ORDNANCE,*** WEARING ***OUR GEAR.*** INDECISIVE PATTY-CAKE ***POSTURING,*** OR ***ONE-STOP SHOPPING?*** OR DID THE STUFF JUST ***FALL OFF*** THE BACK OF A ***TRUCK?***

CALM YOURSELF, AMBASSADOR. I'VE ALREADY GIVEN OUT MY INSTRUCTIONS. AS WE SPEAK, A NEW CAMP IS BEING SET UP NEAR THE BORDER.

IT'S NOT THE CAMP I'M CONCERNED WITH! YOU TELL ME HOW I'M SUPPOSED TO ALIGN MYSELF WITH RHABIB'S GROUP WHEN I'VE NOW NOTHING TO GIVE HIM!

I'VE LOST A PARTNER WHO COULD GIVE ME PROTECTION. I'LL BE DEAD WITHIN 72 HOURS!

UNFORTUNATE. HOWEVER, I DID NOT CREATE YOUR ENEMIES.

NO, YOU DIDN'T. BUT YOU'VE CREATED A FEW OF YOUR OWN.

THEY FOUND ONE OF MY MEN OUTSIDE OF CAMP. HE'D BEEN DRAGGED THERE BY SOME RED-CLOAKED GHOST!

MY MAN SAID THE GHOST KEPT REPEATING THE SAME TWO WORDS: "JASON WYNN. JASON WYNN. JASON WYNN."

"IT'S THE DEVIL HIMSELF," MY MAN SAID JUST BEFORE HE DIED.

WHATEVER IT IS, I DON'T LIKE BEING CAUGHT IN YOUR PERSONAL WARS. THE OTHERS WILL HEAR ABOUT THIS!

ELSEWHERE, THE COLD HISS OF STATIC IS SUDDENLY INTERRUPTED.

GODDAMMIT! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?! I THOUGHT YOU WERE CAUGHT IN... NEVER MIND!

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'VE JUST STARTED?

A DOMINO EFFECT, HOPEFULLY. ONE LEADING RIGHT BACK TO ITS SOURCE.

YOU BLEW UP OUR EVIDENCE. WHAT WERE YOU THINKING--?!

DON'T WORRY. I KEPT A FEW SOUVENIRS.

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SPAWN

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AND SO I **DREAM**.

ALWAYS FLOATING BACK TO THE SAME PLACE... MY HOME. IT USED TO BE **SAFE** TO GO THERE. BUT NOW IT'S ALL SO CONFUSING. SO **TAINTED**.

IT ALL KEEPS GETTING MIXED UP. AND I CAN'T SORT ANYTHING OUT.

I DON'T EVEN TRY ANYMORE. SOMEHOW, THEY ALL **BELONG** TOGETHER. THE LOGIC OF IT WILL COME ONE NIGHT WHILE I SLEEP.

FOR NOW, I JUST WANT TO SEE THEM... MY **FAMILY**...

...WANT TO REMEMBER HOW IT WAS. **BRIAN** PLAYING WITH HIS SPACE TOYS. ALWAYS BANGING THEM TOGETHER.

LUKE... I THINK THAT WAS THE NAME OF HIS FAVORITE ONE.

AND **LORI**. GOD, HOW SHE LIT UP A ROOM WITH HER SMILE.

THERE WAS NO BETTER MOM OR WIFE.

I SWEAR SHE LIVED IN HER APRON. SHE LOVED COOKING SO MUCH.

MAYBE THAT'S WHY **HE** HATED HER.

I'VE COME FOR YOU.

WHY HE DID WHAT HE DID.

TAKING HIS ANGER OUT ON THEM. BECAUSE OF ME.

HURTING THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO MEANT SOMETHING TO ME. FORCING THEM TO SUFFER. MAKING THEM ***SCREAM.***

UNLEASHING THE BEAST I'D FAILED TO CREATE ON MY OWN.

IT DIDN'T MATTER. HE CAME ***ANYWAY.*** *FROM THE PIT OF* ***BLACK.*** *THE* ***GREATEST CONQUEROR OF ALL.***

IGNORING EVERY PLEA FOR MERCY.

BLOOD. REVENGE. THOSE WERE **HIS** MASTERS.

MY WIFE IS FIRST.

BRIAN, HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND. HOW **COULD** HE? HE JUST TURNED SIX.

SO INNOCENT.

SO PLAYFUL.

NOW HE'S WITH HIS MOTHER.

AND I'M ALONE... WITH HIM. THE BEAST STILL LIVES. EMBRACING DEATH WITH HIS COLD STARE.

I LOOK INTO HIS EYES. NOTHING'S THERE.

JUST **EMPTINESS.**

A SOULLESS GAZE. DEVOID OF EVERYTHING.

EVERYTHING.

NOW HE SEARCHES ME OUT. LIKE HE DOES EVERY NIGHT. HE SHALL ESCAPE MY DREAMS, THEN THEY WILL BELIEVE ME.

THEN THEY'LL ALL UNDERSTAND.

creeek

I'VE COME FOR YOU.

HA-HA... ISN'T THAT WHAT YOUR *BOGEY-MAN* SAYS IN YOUR DREAMS?

YOU SAID YOU'D NEVER TELL ANYONE. YOU *PROMISED* ME.

GUESS I *LIED*. I *DO* THAT TO PSYCHOS.

YOU WANT YOUR DAILY SLOP OR NOT?

HE COMES BY EVERY DAY. BRINGING FOOD. OR *PAIN*. BEATING ME SO I WON'T THINK STRAIGHT. I'VE GROWN TO KNOW HIM. HOW HE WORKS OR WHAT HE THINKS.

BUT I HAVE TO CHECK *AGAIN*. MAKE SURE IT'S NOT THE BEAST IN *DISGUISE*.

NO, IT'S NOT HIM. THE *EYES* AREN'T EMPTY.

TOMORROW, I NEED TO LOOK *AGAIN*.

BAM!

FINE! *STARVE* YOURSELF, *I* DON'T CARE.

CLATCH

I ALREADY KNEW THAT.

*BECAUSE TO **THEM**, I'M JUST AN INSANE **CAPTIVE**. SOMEONE THEY CAN MOCK. POKE FUN AT. THEY THINK I'M PLAYING SOME KIND OF MINDGAME.*

THEY'VE BECOME IGNORANT.

SO I LET THEM THINK WHAT THEY WILL. SEE, I DON'T CARE EITHER.

THEY'RE JUST A BUNCH OF MAGGOTS. LIKE THOSE IN THE SWILL I EAT EVERY DAY. I'VE DEALT WITH THEIR KIND BEFORE. KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THEM.

*BUT THEY'VE LEARNED NONE OF **MY** SECRETS.*

LIKE HOW TO MAKE LEADERS. CREATE CONQUERORS. CONTROL MURDERERS.

*AND I LEARNED IT ALL FROM **HIM**. THE **GREAT BEAST. GENGHIS KHAN**, THE GREATEST WARRIOR OF THIS EXISTENCE.*

THAT'S WHY WYNN WANTED ME. WHY HE NEEDED ME.

STRATEGIC MILITARY EXPERTS WERE HARD TO COME BY, AND I WAS THE BEST. WYNN KNEW THAT.

HE WAS MOTIVATED BY A SPECIFIC, PERSONAL OBJECTIVE. HE WANTED ME TO MAKE HIM THE NEXT GREAT RULER. USING THE PHILOSOPHIES I'D PULLED FROM MY RESEARCH. SPECIFICALLY THOSE OF KHAN.

THE MAN WHO CREATED THE MONGOLIAN EMPIRE THROUGH BRUTALITY AND TERROR. DROWNING ENTIRE NATIONS IN THE BLOOD OF THEIR OWN CITIZENS.

KHAN ONCE SAID-- BEFORE SLAYING A DOZEN HIGH PRIESTS--

"-- I AM THE PUNISHMENT OF GOD. IF YOU HAD NOT COMMITTED YOUR GREAT SINS, THEN GOD WOULD NOT HAVE INFLICTED ME UPON YOU."

BUT WHAT WAS LORI'S SIN?

IT WAS THEIR FAULT HE WAS KILLING THEM. NOT HIS.

GOD, HOW I MISS HER.

TWO DAYS LATER.

AT FIRST, THE COMMOTION IS **DISTANT**. LIKE MOST OTHER ACTIVITIES, IT DOESN'T INVOLVE THE INMATES.

WHEN FOOTSTEPS BUILD INTO AN AVALANCHE OF **PANIC**, THOSE HIDDEN AWAY KNOW THIS IS **DIFFERENT**.

CONTROL HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE WARDEN'S RULE.

GET SECTOR FIVE SEALED OFF **NOW!!**

OVER THERE, IN THE **SHADOWS!**

A **WAR** HAS BEGUN.

AS GUNFIRE ECHOES THROUGH THE STONE CORRIDORS, TRUCKS AND JEEPS SQUEAL TIRES IN PURSUIT OF SOMETHING UNKNOWN.

THE ENTIRE INSTALLATION HAS BECOME A FRENZIED BATTLEFIELD.

I NEED A BACKUP AT CORRIDOR 12! YOU OTHERS-- THE WAREHOUSE HAS BEEN LEVELED!

SIRENS SCREAM. LIGHTS FLASH **RED**-- LIKE **BLOOD**.

IT'S **HIM**. HE'S HERE. COME TO TAKE RETRIBUTION FOR ALL OUR SINS.

ESPECIALLY **MINE**. WHY DID I TRY KEEPING HIM AWAY? HE ALWAYS WINS.

SEARCH THE CELLS!

SLAM!

NOTHING HERE. LET'S GO!

NO! I MUST CHECK.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

NOT HIM.

OR HIM.

THEY'RE NOT EMPTY.

MAYBE I'M WRONG. WHAT IF THIS IS JUST ANOTHER REBEL MILITIA, ATTACKING US FOR OUR SUPPLIES? IT HAPPENS ALL THE TIME, RAIDS ON OTHER CAMPS. WARRING FACTIONS. IT'LL GO AWAY...

... IT HAS TO. I WANT IT TO. PLEASE MAKE THE NOISE STOP.

JUST STOP!!

IT'S HURTING!! LIKE MY BOY. HE'S NOT PLAYING ANY-MORE. HE'S HURT. HE WANTS HIS TOY.

GIVE HIM HIS TOY! HE WANTS LUKE!!

NOISES. IN MY HEAD. SO MANY OF THEM. I NEED TO SHUT THEM OFF BEFORE...

WHERE IS EVERYONE?! WHERE ARE THEY HIDING... HE COULDN'T HAVE KILLED THEM ALREADY. THERE WERE TOO MANY OF THEM. EVEN THE BEAST REQUIRES TIME.

THERE!

I HEAR SHOUTING. SOME MEN ARE STILL ALIVE. HIDING AMID THE SMOKING WRECKAGE. BUT NOT FOR LONG. THE WINDS WILL EXPOSE THEM IN A FEW MINUTES.

LEAVING THEM NAKED WITH THEIR SINS.

BEFORE COMING AFTER ME HE'LL DEAL WITH THEM. BRINGING DEATH TO EACH.

ASHES TO ASHES. DUST TO DUST.

THEY'VE RELEASED THE SCOURGE. GIVEN HIM REASON TO RETURN.

KHAN!

CLOAK DRIPPING WITH THE BLOOD OF A MILLION INNOCENTS. WOMEN CHILDREN. THEY DIDN'T MATTER.

THAT'S WHAT MADE HIM GREAT. HE'D RID HIMSELF OF GUILT.

MY **WIFE.** MY **SON.** THEY MEANT **NOTHING.**

ONLY **DOMINATION** WAS MEANINGFUL. ANNIHILATING HIS ENEMIES. USING THE WOMEN OF HIS CONQUESTS FOR MOMENTARY PLEASURE. LAUGHING AT THEM AS THEY BEGGED FOR THEIR LIVES. STARING BACK AT THEM WITH THOSE DAMN' EMPTY EYES.

WYNN SAID LORI **SCREAMED.** ASKING THEM TO SPARE BRIAN.

HE WAS ONLY A CHILD.

BUT THEY WANTED **ME** TO UNDERSTAND.

THAT'S WHY THEY GAVE ME THE BOX. SO I'D REMEMBER WHAT HE'D DONE.

...BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND LEADERS FROM THE FORMER CZECHO-SLOVAKIA ARE STALLED ONCE AGAIN. THIS MOST RECENT MEETING, THE RESULT OF AGREEMENTS BROKERED AT THE UNITED NATIONS, WAS TO HAVE BEEN LITTLE MORE THAN A PHOTO OPPORTUNITY. BOTH SIDES HAD MET THE CONDITIONS FOR THE FUNDING, A SET OF CAREFULLY BALANCED SANCTIONS AFFECTING BOTH IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF MANUFACTURED GOODS.

IT NOW APPEARS THAT FURTHER NEGOTIA-TIONS WILL BE NEEDED TO APPEASE THE SLAVIC AND CZECH LEADERS. SOURCES AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT INDICATE THAT THE RIFT COMES IN THE WAKE OF ISOLATED ATTACKS WITHIN EACH COUNTRY THIS PAST WEEK.

THE FILM BOARD OF AMERICA IS FEELING A BIT ***PECKISH*** JUST NOW. A RECENT THAWING ON THE CULTURAL FRONT HAD OPENED THE DOOR FOR UNPRECEDENTED NUMBERS OF U.S. FILMS INTO ***CHINA***, AS LONG AS THEY PASSED A ***SUR-PRISINGLY*** LIBERAL RATINGS SYSTEM PUT IN PLACE BY BEIJING. BUT, IN AN ABRUPT STATE-MENT TODAY, CHINA ***BARRED*** THE IMPORT OF ANY MORE AMERICAN-MADE MOVIES. STUDIO EXECS BLUSTERED BACK, BERATING THE CHINESE FOR FLIP-FLOPPING.

HOLLYWOOD THEN GOT ON THE PHONE TO THE WHITE HOUSE AND LOBBIED FOR ***SANCTIONS*** AGAINST THE CHINESE. THIS CREATES YET ***ANOTHER*** HEADACHE FOR THE PRESIDENT, WHO OWES A ***DEBT*** OR TWO TO THE ENTER-TAINMENT COMMUNITY.

ONE NEWSPAPER SUGGESTS A LINK TO AN ABORTED DELIVERY OF ***MILITARY SUPPLIES.*** ALL SIDES HAVE ***DISMISSED*** THIS AS "UNSUBSTANTIATED CONJECTURE". WELL, THEY ***WOULD,*** WOULDN'T THEY?

HAH! COINCIDENCE?! ***I DOUBT IT!***

MAYBE OUR MASTERS ON ***WALL STREET,*** AND THE ***STATE DEPARTMENT'S*** SPIN DOCTORS WILL CALL IT THAT, BUT WHAT ***ELSE*** WOULD WE EXPECT THEM TO SAY? THEY ***NEED*** BELIEVERS, AND PARANOIA NEVER SEDUCED ANYONE. MEANWHILE, THE PRESIDENT IS BEING HIT BY A SERIES OF MINOR BUT ***WITHERING*** SETBACKS IN FOREIGN POLICY. INDIVIDUALLY, THEY DON'T AMOUNT TO MUCH, BUT PUT 'EM ALL TOGETHER AND THE U.S. STARTS TO LOOK LIKE IT DOESN'T HAVE A CLEAN SHIRT ON ***PROM NIGHT.*** THERE'S ***NO WAY*** IT'S A FLUKE THAT ALL THESE DISTRACTIONS ARE COMING ON TOP OF EACH OTHER.

WE ARE BEING SENT A ***MESSAGE*** AND I HOPE SOMEONE IS ***LISTENING.*** ALL THESE SITUA-TIONS ARE ROOTED IN FACTIONAL ATTACKS THAT ***NO ONE*** SEEMS TO HAVE ***COMMITTED.*** LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, SAY HELLO TO THE ***GUERILLA GHOST!***

NEW YORK CITY. HALF A CONTINENT AWAY.

...AND I EXPECT TO SEE A FULL REPORT ON MY DESK IN 48 HOURS. IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?

YES, MR. WYNN. WE HAVE EVERY INTERNATIONAL AGENT AT OUR DISPOSAL ASKING QUESTIONS. WHOEVER IS DOING THIS WILL...

BREEP BREEP

GODDAMIT. I SPECIFICALLY ASKED ***NOT*** TO BE INTERRUPTED.

I KNOW, SIR, BUT IT'S THE PRESIDENT. HE SAID IT WAS URGENT.

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

HELLO, JASON, I'LL MAKE THIS BRIEF. AT SOME OF OUR OVERSEAS SUMMITS LATELY, THE LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES HAVE BEEN LESS THAN WARM TO OUR POINT OF VIEW.

THE UNDERCURRENT OF IT ALL SEEMS TO BE FALLOUT FROM... BUSINESS... DONE WITH YOUR DEPARTMENT.

WHO'S RAISING OBJECTIONS?

I'M NOT HERE TO DISCUSS DETAILS, JASON. BUT WHATEVER CONNECTIONS YOU HAVE WITH THESE COUNTRIES, BE THEY PUBLIC OR PRIVATE, THEY'RE SLOWLY COMING UNWOUND.

THIS IS CREATING PROBLEMS ON MY END. SO I'D LIKE YOU TO FOCUS ALL YOUR ENERGIES INTO ***RESOLVING*** THESE SITUATIONS.

THAT'S ALL. HAVE A GOOD EVENING.

CLICK

THEN PUT HIM ON.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?! YOU HAVE YOUR ASSIGNMENTS. SO GET ***TO*** IT!

MOMENTS LATER, A GROTESQUE FORM OOZES FROM THE SHADOWS.

tsk! tsk!

THAT'S *QUITE* A *TEMPER* YOU'VE GOT THERE, MY BOY!

WHAT THE HELL DO *YOU* WANT?

JUST THE PLEASURE OF SEEING YOU *SQUIRM.*

YEAH? WELL, WHAT DO YOU *KNOW* ABOUT THIS? I THOUGHT YOU COULD CONTROL ANYTHING.

I *CAN.*

BUT, Y'SEE, JASON, I NEED THINGS IN *RETURN.* YOUR GOAL IS TO RID US BOTH OF SPAWN. FIRST, BY DESTROYING HIM EMOTIONALLY... THEN, ULTIMATELY, *ELIMINATING* HIM.

INSTEAD, HE'S TURNED THE WHEEL *BACK* ON YOU.

Y'KNOW, THE *FUNNY* THING IS, IF I EVER TOLD YOU HIS *NAME,* YOU'D BE ABLE TO FIX YOUR PROBLEM A *LOT* QUICKER.

I'M GETTING TIRED OF YOUR GAMES, CLOWN. IF YOU'RE HIDING SOMETHING, THEN SPIT IT OUT.

NO CAN DO. YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN THIS TIME. THE *ONLY* WAY HELL'S GOING TO SEE THAT HUMANS AREN'T *FIT* FOR SPAWNING IS IF ONE OF HIS *OWN KIND* DOES HIM IN.

YOU NEED TO FIGURE THIS PUZZLE OUT *ON YOUR OWN.*

BESIDES, YOU KEEP TELLING ME HOW *POWERFUL* YOU ARE. *PROVE* IT!

OTHERWISE, YOU'RE ABOUT TO SLOWLY FADE INTO OBLIVION.

A FEW FLOORS BELOW THE OFFICE OF THE C.I.A. SECURITY CHIEF, TERRY FITZGERALD CONTINUES TO SYSTEMATICALLY WEAKEN JASON WYNN'S WEB OF GLOBAL INFLUENCE--

--BY DISRUPTING HIS "SIDE BUSINESS" OF HIJACKING WEAPONS SHIPMENTS AND SELLING THEM TO AMERICA'S ENEMIES.

HE'S USING A WEAPON HE HOPES WILL SURVIVE THE MADNESS.

IT'S TIME.

BIRTHDAY BOY, THIS IS POPPA ONE. DO YOU COPY? IF SO, GIVE CONFIRMATION ON SECURE LINE 12.

beep

GOOD. SINCE YOU'RE IN HOSTILE TERRITORY, I DON'T EXPECT ANY VERBAL COMMUNICATION ON YOUR PART.

JUST GET MAJOR FOSBERG OUT OF THERE. AND *NO* MORE GETTING SIDETRACKED LIKE YOU DID IN KOREA. *

*LAST ISSUE--Tom.

WE CAN'T AFFORD TO HAVE THE MAJOR BECOME INJURED. HE'S GOT INFORMATION VITAL TO US.

IF I'M RIGHT, THAT INFO WILL HELP EXPEDITE WYNN'S EXTINCTION. SO STAY FOCUSED. THIS IS THE BREAK WE NEED.

RAT CITY.

A PLACE MOST WOULD DARE NOT TREAD. HIDDEN DEEP IN THE BELLY OF NEW YORK'S **BOWERY**, IT HAS BECOME OFF-LIMITS EVEN TO THOSE WHO ARE ACCUSTOMED TO THE AREA'S FILTH AND SQUALOR.

FOR, HIDDEN IN THE **SHADOWS** OF THIS INSANE ENVIRONMENT CRAWL THE LOWEST EXAMPLES OF HUMANITY. EVEN THE MOST **DESPERATE** OF THE HOMELESS KNOW NOT TO VENTURE HERE. YET, THERE ARE THOSE WHO **DO**. THE FEW WHO MAKE IT **OUT** ARE NEVER THE SAME AGAIN. THE DISAPPEARANCES, THE RANTINGS THEN GIVE CREDENCE TO THE TALES SPREAD BY THOSE LIVING ON ITS' EDGE.

FOR THE PAST WEEK, A BLACK **MONSTROSITY** HAS DWELLED IN THIS OPPRESSIVE DOMAIN. WAITING **PATIENTLY** FOR THE RETURN OF ITS **QUARRY**. THE SIMIAN'S INSTINCTS LED IT TO THE DEEPEST, MOST **NIGHTMARISH** SECTION. CHARRED **BODY PARTS** DANGLE FROM WHAT HAD BEEN A **FUNERAL PYRE**... AND IS NOW A **THRONE**

THIS IS WHERE THE **SCENT** IS STRONGEST.

THE **STENCH** OF **SPAWN**.

MY BOX. IT'S ALL I HAVE LEFT. THE ONLY THING THEY'D LET ME KEEP.

WYNN SAID I'D BE PART OF IT ONE DAY. BUT THAT'S OKAY, AT LEAST I CAN JOIN THEM. BE WITH MY FAMILY AGAIN.

YES, THAT'S IT. PRETEND. SHUT OUT THE NOISE. THEN I WON'T BE AFRAID.

HE CAN'T SCARE ME IF I'M NOT AFRAID. SOMETIMES I'M ABLE TO PRETEND FOR ALMOST AN HOUR.

KEEPING THE BEAST AT BAY, THINKING OF HOW I BUILT HIM IN THE FIRST PLACE.

FRANKENSTEIN. THAT'S WHO I BECAME. DR. FRANKENSTEIN. TRYING TO BREATHE LIFE INTO WYNN BY USING THE TECHNIQUES OF ANOTHER, LONG DEAD.

BUT I COULD SENSE HE WASN'T PURE. HE WASN'T CAPABLE OF DEALING WITH WHAT I COULD GIVE HIM: THE POWER OF KHAN. HIS SKILLS, HIS TRAITS, WEREN'T MEANT FOR THIS CENTURY.

WYNN DIDN'T ACCEPT THIS. HAVING FELT THE EUPHORIA OF A FEW INITIAL, DISCREET MOVES, HIS VICTORIES DROVE HIM MAD. HE CRAVED MORE. HE DEMANDED MY INSIGHT.

I IGNORED HIS PLEAS. NOT WANTING TO ACCEPT HOW MUCH OF MY TEACHINGS HE'D **ALREADY** ABSORBED.

THEN CAME HIS **THREATS**. PROMISES OF CARNAGE, CULMINATED BY THE RELEASE OF THE DEVIL-BEAST HIMSELF. SENT TO **ABOLISH** ME FOR KNOWING HIS SECRETS.

INSTEAD, I LAUGHED. FORCING HIM NEARLY INTO **FITS** FAR BEYOND DESCRIPTION. BUT HE WOULDN'T SHOW IT. HE **COULDN'T**, NOT IF HE WAS TO BE A GREAT WARRIOR. STILL, I **FELT** IT. HIS ANGER WELLED UP BEHIND A PAIR OF EYES BLACK AS THE ABYSS.

HIDING **RAGE**. BLURRING THE LOGIC OF A NORMAL MAN.

HE SPENT THAT MADNESS ON MY **WIFE**. MY **BOY**. MY **FAMILY**.

I REMEMBER HIS **SMILE** AS HE GAVE ME THE BOX, VOWING THAT HE'D SEND **KHAN**. DRIPPING CRIMSON. EYES DEVOID OF **EVERYTHING**.

EXCEPT THE LUST FOR BLOOD.

MINE.

WHY? WHY, WHEN I GAVE YOU LIFE, LET YOU LIVE, DO YOU HAUNT MY **DREAMS**?

I'M **YOU**, DAMMIT! WE'RE THE **SAME**! LEAVE ME **ALONE**. HE WAS JUST A BOY. GIVE HIM HIS **LUKE**! DON'T MAKE HER BEG!

NO. I HAVE TO FOCUS. **PRETEND**. THEN HE CAN'T LIVE.

HAVE TO KEEP HIM INSIDE.

IN MY DREAMS.

THEN HE CAN'T TOUCH ME.

18

OR BECOME REAL.

SO WHY DO THE GUARDS KEEP **SCREAMING**? WHAT'S **SCARING** THEM?

NOT **HIM**. IT **CAN'T** BE. THIS IS JUST SOME ELABORATE **TRICK** THAT WYNN'S MASTER-MINDING.

TRYING TO WRECK MY FOCUS. HOPING I'LL GIVE IN. WISHING FOR MY...

wha...?

IT'S QUIET. WHY HAS EVERYTHING GONE SILENT?! WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE **NOISE**?! THE **PANIC**?!

MY GOD... HE'S SWALLOWED THEIR SIN. NO. YES. FOOTSTEPS. GETTING **CLOSER**.

KRAK

I WON'T DO IT. YOU'VE FOOLED ME TOO MANY TIMES. YOU CAN'T MAKE ME LOOK. NOT THIS TIME.

HAVE TO PRETEND. SHUT MY EYES. DON'T THINK. CAN'T THINK. WHERE'S THE NOISE? WHY'D YOU STOP THE TORTURE?

WHO ARE YOU?

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

NOOOOO!

THE EMPTINESS.

HE'S HERE -- FOR THEM -- AGAIN! MY FAMILY, HAVE TO SAVE THEM.

DAMN YOU, WYNN! EVERY TIME I TRY TO FORGET, YOU SEND HIM. BUT ALWAYS IN MY DREAMS.

NOT LIKE THIS. NEVER LIKE THIS.

LORI. WHAT'S HE DOING TO LORI?! DON'T MAKE HER SCREAM.

STOP! DAMN YOU. IT'S MY FAULT. NOT HERS. ME!

YOU WANT MY SINS!

FORSBERG--

--I'VE COME FOR YOU.

YOU CAN'T HAVE THEM.

I WON'T LET YOU.

NO.

NOT AGAIN.

NOT *AGAIN!*

IT'S *MY* BOX!!

IT BELONGS TO ME! I HAVE TO *PROTECT* THEM!!

DO YOU HEAR, KHAN? WE'RE *NOT AFRAID* OF YOU.

LOOK, I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS CRAP.

ESPECIALLY NOT WHEN I'M ABOUT TO **SAVE** YOUR SORRY LITTLE ASS.

SO, YOU'RE COMING WITH ME, LIKE IT OR **NOT.**

MY BOX.

MY *BOX!*

I *DROPPED MY BOX!*

No! WE CAN'T LEAVE THEM.

THEY NEED ME.

MY FAMILY NEEDS ME!!

image
57 JAN DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

I'M TELLING YOU, TERRY, WE'RE GOING TO GET **NOTHING** OUT OF THIS GUY.

RIP RIP RIP RIP RIP

HE DIDN'T SAY A WORD THE WHOLE TRIP BACK. JUST KEPT MUMBLING UNDER HIS BREATH.

RIP RIP RIP RIP RIP

NOW HE'S LYING IN **CRAP**, PLAYING SOME PSYCHO **GAME** WITH HIMSELF. THIS GUY'S A WASTE.

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?!...

RIP RIP RIP RIP RIP RIP RIP

...HE'S BEEN ROTTING IN SOLITARY FOR *YEARS*. PROBABLY *TORTURED* REGULARLY. I CAN'T FIND ANY CURRENT RECORD OF HIS FAMILY--

RIP RIP RIP RIP RIP RIP

--SO WE CAN ASSUME THEY WERE SNUFFED OUT.

AND IF I WASN'T SO DAMNED *PARANOID* THAT WYNN MIGHT BE *WATCHING* ME, I'D PUT MAJOR FOSBERG SOMEPLACE LESS NASTY THAN *YOUR* LITTLE CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

RIP RIP RIP RIP

THE INSULT CUTS DEEP. SPAWN IS TEMPTED TO BREAK COMMUNICATIONS RIGHT THEN.

DID YOU HEAR ME? AL?! YOU STILL THERE?

I'M HERE.

GOOD. WHAT I NEED IS THAT HE NOT BE TRAUMATIZED ANY FURTHER. THE TRIP BACK FROM THE FAR EAST, WRAPPED IN YOUR CLOAK, WOULD UNSETTLE ANYONE.

SO DO ME A FAVOR, KEEP HIM WARM.

IT'S FREEZING TONIGHT.

THE COLD DOESN'T PENETRATE DOWN HERE.

SO WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED?

TIME.

THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT WYNN'S GOONS DID TO THIS GUY. SOMEHOW WE HAVE TO CONVINCE HIM ***WE'RE*** NOT THE ENEMY. THAT'S GOING TO BE TOUGH.

THE ONLY REASON FOSBERG'S STILL ALIVE IS BECAUSE HE'S ***VALUABLE***. WYNN WOULD HAVE ***KILLED*** HIM OTHER-WISE.

KCHIK

I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT, TERRY, 'CAUSE YOU DIDN'T SEE HOW HE WAS LIVING.* I'D SAY WE'RE DEALING MORE WITH AN **ANIMAL** THAN A MAN.

*LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

WE JUST HAVE TO FIND THE KEY. THE THING THAT WILL PUT HIM BACK IN HIS RIGHT MIND.

AS WYNN'S TOP MILITARY STRATEGIST, HE'D HAVE BEEN PRIVY TO... uh?

LOOK, AL, I'VE GOTTA GO, ***NOW!***

HI, HONEY. YOU'RE BACK EARLY, AREN'T YOU?

WE CUT OUR MEETING SHORT TONIGHT. Y'KNOW, WITH THE WEATHER AND EVERYTHING.

HOW WAS CYAN?

WITH TERRY GONE, SPAWN NOW SITS STARING AT WHAT APPEARS TO BE A CHILD HIDDEN IN A MAN'S BODY... A ONCE-BRILLIANT MIND NOW WITH-DRAWN AS A RESULT OF WYNN'S BRAINWASHING.

SPAWN'S SEEN IT BEFORE, WHEN HE WAS WORKING FOR WYNN.

THE SYSTEMATIC MANIPU-LATION OF EVENTS AND ACTIONS THAT LEAD TO SUCH A STATE OF ANXIETY THE MIND SHUTS DOWN, OR RETREATS.

FAMILY.

FRIENDS.

JOBS.

NOTHING IS SACRED TO WYNN. ANY ACHILLES HEEL THAT CAN BE EXPLOITED TO HIS ADVANTAGE IS FAIR GAME.

BUT HE ONLY DID IT IF THE VICTIM HAD SOMETHING WYNN NEEDED.

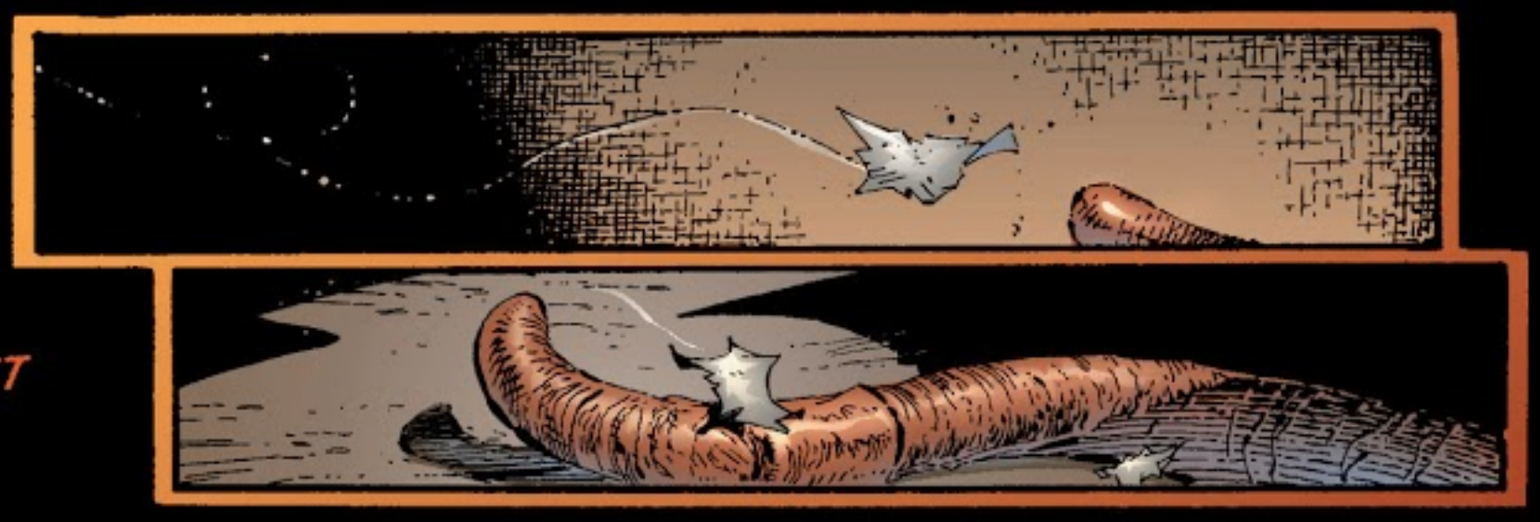
OTHERWISE, THEY JUST CONVENIENTLY DISAPPEARED...

... INSTEAD OF BEING LEFT BEHIND WITH NOTHING BUT THEIR OWN FEAR.

RIP RIP RIP RIP RIP

BUT IF A SENSE OF NORMALITY IS NEEDED TO DETOX THIS VICTIM, SPAWN WONDERS TOO HOW BEING HOOKED UP WITH A WALKING DEAD MAN FROM HELL IS GOING TO RESTORE THIS MAN'S SANITY.

STILL, IF AL AND TERRY ARE TO GET THEIR REVENGE, THIS DICHOTOMY MUST BE SORTED OUT...



...WHILE FOSBERG IS SHELTERED IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE ORDINARY FORMS MASK NIGHTMARISH REALITIES...

... LIKE WORMS ACTING AS CARRIERS OF EVIL.

HUNDREDS... THOUSANDS SPILL FORTH -- A FLOOD OF LIVING TISSUE. TWISTING. FIGHTING TO GET TO THE NOURISHMENT.

THEY SENSE IT. FEEL IT.

KNOW IT'S NEAR.

AND THE HELLSPAWN HIMSELF, WHO USES THE WORMS TO REINVIGORATE HIS SYMBIOTE UNIFORM, IS MOMENTARILY CAUGHT OFF-GUARD--

ALL AROUND, THE WORMS GO WILD.

THE GREAT PROPHET WROTE : "... AND THOSE WHO RESIDE IN THE COLD SHADOW OF SIN WILL BE FOREVER DENIED THE GREAT WARMTH OF GOD'S EMBRACE. FOR THE LORD SCORNS THOSE WHO FOLLOW THE PATH OF DARKNESS, AND CONDEMNS THEM, AT DEATH, FOR ALL ETERNITY. THEN SHALL THE SINNER KNOW THE FIERY PIT, BURNING FOR A HUNDRED HUNDRED LIFETIMES IN HELL'S BLOATED BELLY. "

SPAWN HAS LIVED BOTH SIDES OF THAT EQUATION. HE HAS TO WONDER WHICH CONTAINS THE GREATER OF MAN'S SELF-MADE HORRORS.

HIS CLOAK FIGHTS FIERCELY, BUFFERING MOST OF THE ATTACK. THOUGH FOCUSED ON PROTECTING ITS HOST, IT SENSES ANOTHER DUTY TO PERFORM.

SO AN UNSPOKEN MESSAGE IS SENT:

THE CAPTIVE IS STRAYING.

HE MUST BE TAUGHT THE LIMITS OF HIS NEW BOUNDRIES.

LEARN THAT FREEDOM MUST BE GIVEN.

AND THEN, ONLY AT THE **MASTER'S** COMMAND.

HIM WHO, FOR THE PAST TEN MINUTES, HAS BEEN MATCHED BLOW FOR BLOW--

-- BY SOME BLACK **SIMIAN,** AUGMENTED TO FUNCTION AS A CYBERNETIC FRANKEN-STEIN'S MONSTER.

BUT THE EXPERIMENT ALSO WENT AWRY...

...CREATING A SAVAGE CREATURE WHOSE BLOOD-CURDLING **WAILS** POINT TO **INNER DEMONS** NEEDING TO EXACT SOME PERSONAL FORM OF **VENGEANCE.**

ITS OWN SALIVA SPRAYS BACK OVER THE BLACK APE, ADDING ANOTHER LAYER TO ITS CRUSTED FUR.

MORE THAN **THREE HUNDRED MILES** THIS HULKING BEHEMOTH HAD TRAVELED, EVER INTENT ON REACHING ITS GOAL:

THE **HELLSPAWN.**

THOUGH CHANGED PHYSICALLY BY ONE OF THE ELITE DEVILS, AL SIMMONS STILL HAD HIS SOUL--AND HIS **AURA**. FOREVER BOUND TO HIS EXISTENCE, NO MATTER WHAT FORM HE MAY INHABIT.

THIS UNIQUE EMANATION ACTED AS A **BEACON** FOR THE TECHNO-COMPOSITE CREATURE...

... ENABLING IT TO HOME IN ON ITS INTENDED TARGET.

THIS ENIGMATIC SENSORY PROCESS HAS A NAME-- **INSTINCT.**

EACH CREATURE HAS SOME VARIETY OF THIS ENABLING INSIGHT.

SO AS AURAS **SEND** ETHEREAL SIGNALS, OUR INSTINCTS **PULL** THEM IN.

IN THIS CASE, A MIX OF COUNTLESS INTANGIBLES RESULTS IN THE TRIGGERING OF PURE, UNADULTERATED **HATE.**

COURSING THROUGH EVERY SYNAPSE OF ITS BEING.

IT ALSO CREATES AN OPENING FOR SPAWN.

FOR HATRED MUST DWELL SOMEPLACE WHEN DORMANT. THAT SOMPLACE IS THE COLLECTIVE BODY KNOWN AS "SIN".

AND WHERE LIVES SIN, EXISTS EVIL.

IT SERVES AS FOOD FOR THOSE THAT CRAVE ITS ICY TOUCH.

THEIR GREAT MASS BLOTS OUT THE CANOPY OF STARS FOR A MOMENT...

...AND JUST AS QUICKLY THEY ARE SWALLOWED WHOLE BY THE ENGULFING TENDRILS OF A CRIMSON CLOAK.

SHADOWS LIE SILENT.

THEN STEPS FORTH HELL'S CHOSEN WARRIOR. WHOLE AGAIN. READY TO RESUME THE BATTLE, HIS SLITTED EYES FLARING WITH DEFIANCE.

THE SIMIAN PREPARES AS WELL, ITS LOW RASPING BREATH THICK WITH DEADLY INTENT.

IT AWAITS THE ENEMY...

...THE ENEMY WHOSE NEUROLOGICAL FUSION TO HIS OUTER SHELL ALLOWS FOR **REGROWTH** AND **TRANSFORMATION**.

SO WHAT THE WARRIOR **WILLS**, THE COSTUME **GRANTS**.

THE BETTER TO MAKE READY FOR **WAR**.

IT'S WHY AL SIMMONS WAS SELECTED: BECAUSE HIS INTERNAL WIRING **WAS RIGHT**. THE LORDS OF HELL KNEW HIS KIND, AND THEIR VALUE. HOW, IF MOLDED PROPERLY, HE COULD HELP LEAD THE FORCES OF DARKNESS TO THE GATES OF HEAVEN.

THEN HELP **BURN IT DOWN**.

FOR NOW, EARTH IS SPAWN'S **TRAINING GROUND.**

THOUGH HE DOESN'T FULLY **ACCEPT** HIS FATE, HE KNOWS THERE ISN'T MUCH **CHOICE.**

SO HE **DEALS** WITH IT.

C'MON, FREAK-- LET'S SEE WHAT YOU'RE **MADE OF.**

USING WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY TO VANQUISH ANY WHO DARE STAND IN HIS WAY.

FIRST: THE **SET-UP.**

SPAWN FEIGNS **EXHAUSTION**. FOR THE NEXT FEW MINUTES, HE WANTS HIS ENEMY TO PERCEIVE AN ADVANTAGE, HOWEVER FALSE IT MAY BE.

...WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY **GOADING** THE GORILLA BY MOUNTING A COUNTER ATTACK EACH TIME HE TRIES TO FINISH THE ATTACK.

DRIVING THE BEAST INTO A FRUSTRATED **FRENZY**.

CAUSING THE RELEASE OF ADRENALINE, HELPING TO CLOG THE PROCESS OF LOGICAL THOUGHT.

THEN, HELLSPAWN AND CARAPACE BIDE THEIR TIME, WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT. THE PERFECT OPENING.

LIKE **NOW**.

THEIR VICTIMS ALWAYS TAKE THE BAIT.

FIFTEEN FEET FROM IMPACT, OUR DARK HERO LETS OUT WHAT COULD PASS FOR A **SIGH**.

A USELESS DRAIN OF POWER WON'T BE NEEDED THIS FRIGID, WINDSWEPT NIGHT.

THERE ARE **OTHER** HELLISH WAYS.

YAAA!!!

HIS SCREAMS OF PAIN ARE DROWNED OUT BY THE MIND-NUMBING **WAIL** OF AN ENDLESS BLANKET OF LEATHERY HORROR.

INSTANTLY ENCASING SPAWN'S CHALLENGER.

THEN, **POURING** THROUGH EVERY POSSIBLE ORIFICE TO METHODICALLY **SUFFOCATE** THE PREY.

THEIR MISSION COMPLETE, THE WINGED SPECTRES DISSOLVE INTO NIGHT'S DARK BOSOM.

THEIR MASTER'S INTEREST WOULD NOT BE SERVED BY DEATH. **ANSWERS** ARE WHAT HE CRAVES.

HINTS THAT SOMEDAY, HIS UNDEAD LIFE-- THE **INSANITY** IN WHICH HE NOW DWELLS--

--WILL MAKE **SOME** SORT OF TWISTED SENSE.

STILL, MAYBE THERE IS HOPE. EARLIER, TERRY FITZGERALD SPOKE OF A TRIGGER-EFFECT NEEDED TO DRAW SPAWN'S HUMAN PRISONER FROM HIS SELF-INDUCED SHELL.

IT'S AS THE DUST IS SETTLING THAT THE TRIGGER IS PULLED BY AN UNEXPECTED SHOOTER.

CY-GOR...

WHAT?

DID YOU HEAR THAT?! DID YOU HEAR WHAT HE SAID?

SO YOU DO KNOW HOW TO TALK.

CY-GOR! I KNOW THAT NAME. I READ THE FILE. YEARS AGO. I DIDN'T THINK WYNN CARED ABOUT IT.

WYNN? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

"I FOUND OUT LATER THAT WYNN'S COVERT CIRCLE OF MILITARY ALLIES OVERSEAS FELT THEY WERE ***FALLING BEHIND*** IN THEIR RACE TO BUILD THE PERFECT KILLING MACHINE. THEY'D DISCOVERED THAT A TAIWANESE CARTEL HAD GOTTEN A RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT BREAKTHROUGH THAT PUT THEM MAYBE THREE ***YEARS*** AHEAD.

"SO WYNN TOOK A SHORT-CUT, ASSIGNING ONE OF HIS INFILTRATE THEIR FACILITY AND HACK INTO THEIR SYSTEM. ***SIMMONS,*** I THINK HIS NAME WAS.

"A FEW YEARS LATER, THIS SIMMONS ***DIES*** UNDER SUSPICIOUS CIRCUM-STANCES. BUT THE HIT MUST HAVE BEEN A BIT ***SLOPPY,*** SINCE SOME YOUNG CADET IN HIS DIVISION GETS SET TO BLOW THE WHISTLE.

"NEVER ***HAPPENS,*** THOUGH. RUMOR HAS IT HE BECAME ANOTHER GUINEA PIG IN *PROJECT: SIMIAN.*

"***KONIECZNY*** WAS THE BOY'S NAME. INTELLIGENCE SAID HE BE-CAME THE ONE. HALF MONSTER. HALF MAN. A ***CYBERNETIC GORILLA.*** CODE NAME ***CY-GOR!***

MIKE!?

"IF THIS IS HIM THEN WYNN MUST'VE GAINED BIG FINANCIAL AND POLITICAL REWARDS BY SELLING OFF THAT RESEARCH.

"IT PROBABLY WENT OUT PIECEMEAL, IF I KNOW THE SECURITY COUNCIL.

"DOESN'T MATTER, THOUGH. WYNN ALWAYS GETS WHAT HE WANTS."

OUR BLOOD-CLOAKED HERO CROUCHES CLOSE TO HIS FALLEN FOE, DESPERATELY TRYING TO COME TO GRIPS WITH WHAT HE'S JUST HEARD. THAT SOMEHOW THIS BETA-TEST GONE WILD IS LINKED TO A THROWAWAY MISSION HE UNDERTOOK.

SCATTERSHOT, THE POSSIBILITIES RACE THROUGH HIS MIND, WITH ONE CONCLUSION HITTING HIM AGAIN AND AGAIN...

IT CAN'T BE. NOT YOU, MIKE.

LOOK! IT'S MOVING!

IMAGERY. CY-GOR'S SPASTIC GASPS INDICATE A STRUGGLE DEEP WITHIN. LIMITED BY WHAT HUMAN INTELLIGENCE IS LEFT, THE CREATURE RELIVES GHASTLY SCENARIOS.

THE TRAGIC CREATURE KNOWS THEY ARE TRUE -- HIS "REAL" BODY NOW REPLACED BY HYDRAULIC PROSTHETICS AND GENETICALLY ALTERED TISSUES FROM MAN'S EVOLUTIONARY COUSIN.

AND THEN ALL WENT BLACK, LEAVING NOTHING BUT **PAIN**. PRIMAL SENSES WERE IGNITED.

ALL OBSESSED WITH ONE OBJECTIVE: TO TRACK DOWN HIS CREATOR.

AND **DESTROY**. SAVAGELY.

ELSEWHERE.

YOU WANT ME TO BELIEVE YOU, THEN STOP DANCING AROUND. WHY IS THIS STUFF HERE?

I TOLD YOU, IT HAS TO DO WITH WYNN. SOMEONE'S HELPING ME GATHER DATA AGAINST HIM.

THEN WHY WERE YOU TRYING TO DO THIS BEHIND MY BACK? WE'VE BEEN WORKING ON THIS CASE TOGETHER. I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY HOURS I POURED OVER YOUR FILES, LOOKING FOR CLUES THAT MIGHT LEAD YOU SOMEWHERE.

BUT ALL THIS *SCARES* ME. ESPECIALLY *WYNN.*

ME TOO, IT'S JUST THAT I'M GETTING CLOSER TO NAILING HIM, BIG TIME. ONE OR TWO MORE CRUCIAL PIECES AND I CAN GO PUBLIC WITH THIS.

FOR NOW, THIS IS THE BEST WAY I CAN THINK OF TO DO THAT.

I WANT TO SUPPORT YOU, TERRY, BUT SOMETIMES I CAN'T HELP WONDERING IF ALL THIS IS WORTH IT.

HE KNOWS WE HAVE A CHILD.

AND IF HE'S CAPABLE OF FRAMING YOU FOR *MURDER*†, I DON'T BELIEVE ANY OF US ARE SAFE IF HE FINDS OUT WHAT YOU'RE UP TO.

†ISSUES 21-24 -- Tom.

MADE ME... YOU.

AS A SOLDIER LIEUTENANT COLONEL AL SIMMONS PRIDED HIMSELF ON PROTECTING THOSE IN HIS REGIMENT.

AS A SANCTIONED ASSASSIN, HIS PRIDE CAME FROM CONSISTENT FULFILLMENT OF HIS SUPERIORS' ORDERS.

HE THOUGHT THAT WAS ENOUGH.

HEY...!? WHERE YOU GOING?

I NEED SOME SPACE.

COME BACK HERE!

DON'T LEAVE ME!

WHAT IF KHAN COMES?

WHO *ARE* YOU, ANYWAYS?

LAUGHTER ECHOES HIDEOUSLY THROUGH HELL'S CHAMBERS AS MALEBOLGIA REVELS IN THE THOUGHT THAT HIS NEW SPAWN HAS PUZZLED OUT ANOTHER PIECE OF HIS MACABRE FATE...

... RECEIVED THE KNOWLEDGE THAT A SMALL MEASURE OF THE WORLD'S EVIL WAS VIVIFIED BY HE WHO WAS ONCE A MAN NAMED AL SIMMONS.

HEAVEN CURSES HIS EXISTENCE.

SO DOES HE.

image

58 FEB DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

Capulla 97
McFarlane B:.

TWO MONTHS AGO, WHEN THE OTHER BOYS FIRST HEARD THEIR PLAN, THEY WERE MET WITH MOCKING LAUGHTER. SOON, THAT TURNED TO SCATHING **INSULTS**... AND THEN TO **PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION.**

BUT EACH TAUNTING SERVED ONLY TO MAKE EDDIE MORE FOCUSED ON GETTING HIMSELF AND HIS LITTLE BROTHER ANDY TO THE **ONE** PERSON WHO **UNDERSTOOD** THEM.

ESCAPING THE JUVENILE DETENTION WARD DIDN'T TAKE MUCH. SECURITY HAD ALWAYS BEEN SLOPPY. OF GREATER CONCERN WAS THE LACK OF FOOD AND MONEY THEY'D NEED TO MAKE THEIR LONG TREK.

BOTH BOYS KNEW SACRIFICES WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE, SO A PACT WAS MADE THAT NEITHER WOULD COMPLAIN.

MUCH.

FOR NEARLY TWO WEEKS THEY TRAVELLED BY WHATEVER MEANS AVAILABLE, EATING AND DRINKING THE BARE MINIMUM.

THE **LAST** OF THEIR MONEY BOUGHT A PAIR OF TICKETS THAT WOULD SOON BRING THEIR ODYSSEY TO ITS END.

AND, AS THE SCENIC LANDSCAPE SLOWLY TRANSFORMS INTO A GREY, TOWERING MONSTROSITY,FLORENCE, ALABAMA, SEEMS A MILLION MILES AWAY.

AT FIRST, THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. **THE PEOPLE.** THERE ARE SO ***MANY*** OF THEM. THEN, ONE OF THE ATTENDANTS AT THE PORT AUTHORITY BUS TERMINAL GUIDES THEM TO AN EXIT.

THEY'VE DONE IT.

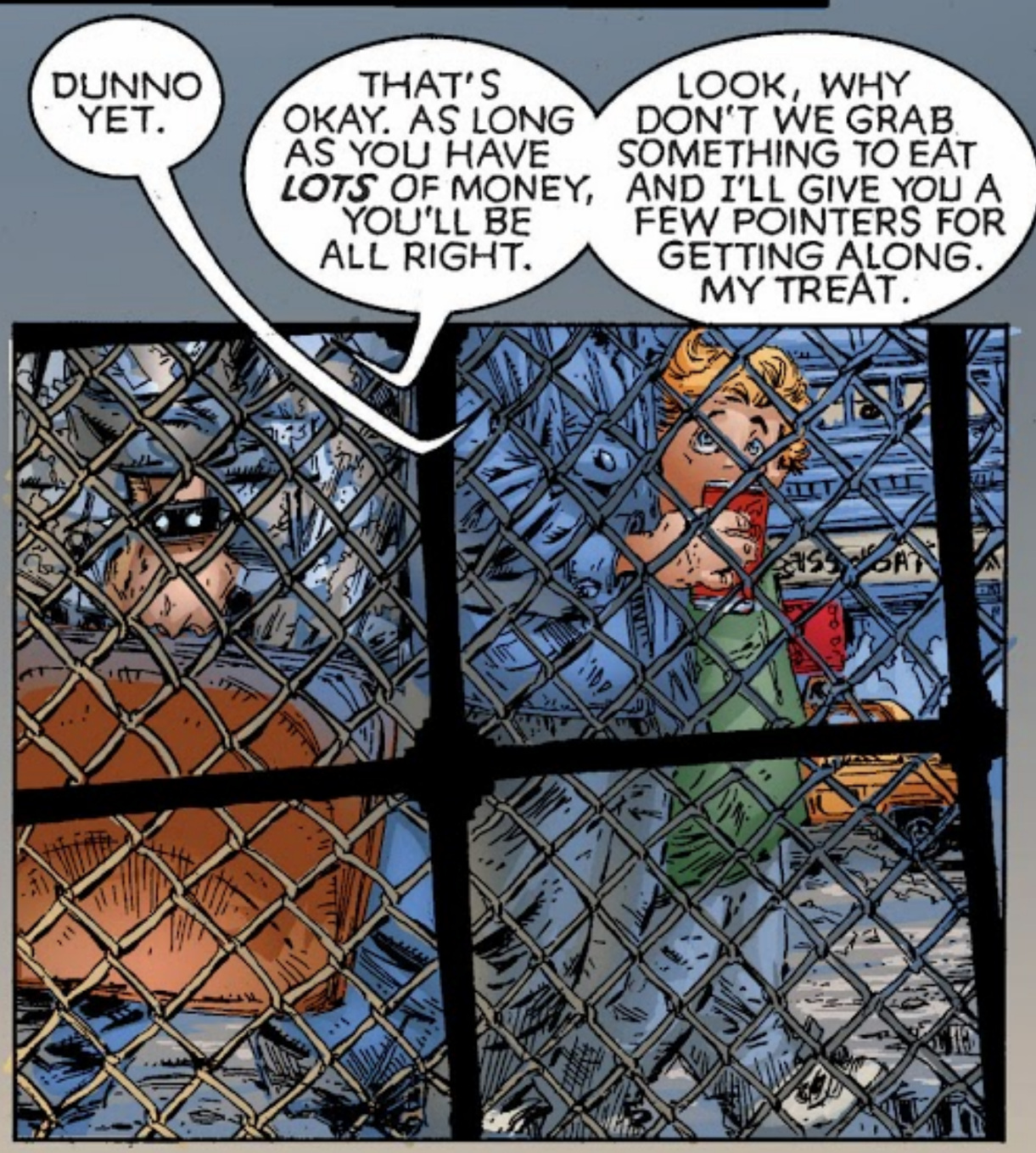
NOW, ALL THEY HAVE TO DO IS FIND ONE SINGLE PERSON AMONG THE MILLIONS WHO LIVE IN THIS MAN-MADE JUNGLE.

NEW YORK CITY. THE FIRST SIGHT OF ITS DEPTHS HAS TRIGGERED A FLOOD OF EMOTIONS IN EVERY FIRST-TIME VISITOR.

OPTIMISM. DELIGHT. APPREHENSION. FEAR.

IT'S THESE FEELINGS THAT ARE TARGETED BY THOSE WHO PREY UPON THE UNINITIATED.

THE ***INNOCENT.***



...SO THAT'S PRETTY MUCH THE LOWDOWN. I'M NOT TRYING TO *SCARE* YOU OR NOTHING, BUT THINGS *CAN* GET *DANGEROUS*.

IT'S JUST A MATTER OF NOT BEING IN THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME.

WE'LL HANDLE IT.

I'M SURE YOU CAN. A COUPLE OF SMART KIDS LIKE YOU, NOBODY'S GONNA MESS AROUND IN YOUR DIRECTION.

BUT...

THE WAY YOUR LITTLE BROTHER PACKS AWAY THE FOOD... I DUNNO... THINGS ARE *REALLY* EXPENSIVE HERE.

TOO BAD YOU DON'T HAVE A JOB SO'S YOU CAN TAKE CARE OF HIM.

AND SO THE TRAP IS SET.

FOR THE REST OF THE EVENING THE MAN KNOWN AS 'SNAKE' CAREFULLY LAYS THE GROUNDWORK...

...SLOWLY MANEUVERING THE CONVERSATION SO THAT, INSTEAD OF FEELING PRESSURED, EDDIE IS THE ONE WHO EVENTUALLY ASKS...

"DO YOU KNOW ANY-ONE WHO HAS WORK?"

KISS

THE SNAKE LEANS FORWARD, THEN SMILES SMUGLY.

AT FIRST, THE GIG IS PENNY-ANTE STUFF.

A NOTE DELIVERED HERE. A LETTER THERE.

SOON IT'S SMALL, UNMARKED PACKAGES.

SLOWLY, OTHER ELEMENTS ARE INTRODUCED. FIRST, **MONEY**, THE ONE THAT MAKES THE MOST SENSE TO EDDIE.

EACH IS EMBRACED BY AN INNOCENT FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD BOY LONGING TO FEEL WANTED. TO HIS CREDIT, HE INDULGES IN MODERATION.

IT'S NOT THE HIGHS THAT SEDUCE HIM AS MUCH AS THE SENSE OF **POWER** HE GETS FROM BEING A PART OF THIS URBAN CULT.

AND THOUGH HE UNDERSTANDS THE **HYPOCRACY** OF IT, EDDIE WON'T ALLOW ANDY TO BE INVOLVED IN ANY OF IT.

FOR, PROTECTING HIS LITTLE BROTHER IS STILL A PRIORITY.

BUT THAT WAS THIRTY DAYS AGO... AND THIS IS NEW YORK.

TONIGHT.

TALONED HANDS, SKILLED AS A SURGEON'S, MANIPULATE INTRICATE BIONETICS, DISSECTING CYBERNETIC GEARBOXES PREVIOUSLY HIDDEN BY FUR.

STOP IT.

LEAVE HIM ALONE.

WHAT'RE YOU DOING?

WE'RE GOING TO DIE.

WOULD YOU SHUT UP! I'M GETTING TIRED OF YOUR RANTINGS.

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

WHERE'S MY FAMILY?

GODDAMN YOU! WHO HAS MY FAMILY?!

THEY'RE HUNGRY.

MY WIFE. MY BOY. THEY NEED FOOD.

LISTEN, CAPTAIN PSYCHO, IF YOU DON'T SHUT THE HELL UP IN ABOUT TWO SECONDS, I'M GOING TO LET THOSE WORMS HAVE THEIR WAY WITH YOU.

YOU DON'T SCARE ME.

YES I DO.

YOU SEE, MOST MEN DON'T SHAKE UNCONTROLLABLY WHILE LYING IN THEIR OWN URINE. ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE SUPPOSED TO BE MILITARY GENIUSES.

KLICH

YOU MUST KNOW WHAT THIS IS.

SURELY YOU'VE SEEN A **TRACKING IMPLANT** BEFORE.

IT'S ROUTINELY INSTALLED IN MOBILE HARDWARE UNITS. THE GOVERNMENT STIFFS DON'T LIKE TAKING CHANCES.

ESPECIALLY WITH SUCH AN **EXPENSIVE** ITEM.

BUT I'M CURIOUS TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I BURST THEIR BUBBLE.

WHETHER THEY HAVE THE GUTS TO TACKLE ME **ALONE.**

JOHNNY! GOD***DAMN***IT! I'VE ***LOST*** HIM! THE SIGNAL JUST WENT ***DEAD!***

WHAT? THEN YOU GET IT BACK, ***NOW!*** YOU HEAR? SOMEHOW, SOME***WAY,*** YOU ***FIND*** THAT SIGNAL.

SYSTEMATICALLY-- FRANTICALLY-- THEY EXHAUST EVERY POSSIBILITY. RECONNECTION NEVER HAPPENS. BOTH MEN KNOW THEY'VE BEEN PUSHED INTO A CORNER.

SO WHEN THE PHONE RINGS THEY LET IT GO WITHOUT ANSWERING IT LONGER THAN USUAL.

HEADQUARTERS IS CHECKING IN, AS ALWAYS, FOR A STATUS REPORT.

AS THE CONVERSATION WINDS DOWN, THE TWO TRACKING AGENTS STARE AT EACH OTHER, SHARING A CHILLING UNDERSTANDING.

*THEY KNOW THEY'VE JUST BECOME **CORPSES.***

THROUGH AN ELABORATE INFRASTRUCTURE OF LEGITIMATE AND ROGUE GOVERNMENT DIVISIONS, VARIOUS CALLS ARE PLACED. A SYSTEM HAS LONG BEEN IN PLACE DESIGNED TO CONCEAL ANY SIGN OF MALFEASANCE...

... KEEPING THOSE INVOLVED INSULATED FROM DETECTION (AND EACH OTHER), WHILE COMPLETELY SHIELDING ITS RINGMASTER.

... AND AS YOU'VE NO DOUBT BECOME AWARE, I'VE BEEN LOSING TIME TO SEVERAL DISTRACTIONS.

"YES, Mr. WYNN."

"I SUGGEST YOU DEVOTE YOURSELF TO FINDING OUR MISSING APE. I NEED SPEED AND ***SUBTLETY***. THE PRESIDENT ALREADY HAS HIS BOY SCOUTS CAMPING AT MY DOOR."

FOR THE HUNDREDTH TIME, CY-GOR SEEMED INTENT ON REACHING NEW YORK IN A HURRY.

WHETHER HE'S STILL IN THE ALLEYS, THERE'S NO WAY OF KNOWING.

LATER...

THE NEW TEAM WILL BE OPERATIONAL IN A FEW HOURS. IF THAT BEAST SO MUCH AS SNEEZES, WE'LL KNOW ABOUT IT. OUR REAL CONCERN IS THAT THE PUBLIC NOT FIND IT FIRST.

I TRUST YOU CAN KEEP THAT FROM HAPPENING. ESPECIALLY WITH THE NUMBER OF POLICE OFFICERS ON YOUR PAYROLL.

AS FOR THE PREVIOUS GROUP... WHEN WILL THEY BE TAKEN CARE OF?

AS WE SPEAK.

KLAK!

THE BODIES OF CY-GOR'S PRECEEDING MONITORING TEAM WILL NEVER BE FOUND WHERE THEY'RE TO BE DUMPED -- UNDER TONS OF REFUSE IN A DISTANT LANDFILL.

BETWEEN THEM, THEY LEAVE BEHIND TWO WIVES AND FIVE CHILDREN.

... INDICATES A GROWING LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESIDENT. THE LATEST NUMBERS SHOW THE PRESIDENT'S APPROVAL RATING HAS DECLINED FOUR PERCENT, SO THAT THOSE WHO CLAIM TO BE "LESS THAN SATISFIED" HAS RISEN TO NEARLY FORTY-SEVEN PERCENT. THIS IS THE LOWEST APPROVAL RATING FOR AN AMERICAN PRESIDENT SINCE JIMMY CARTER'S, DURING THE IRANIAN HOSTAGE CRISIS. A WHITE HOUSE SPOKESPERSON IS QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT THE DOWNTURN HAS LESS TO DO WITH THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF THAN WITH THE BROADER TOPIC OF RECENT SETBACKS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

THE FOREIGN DESK REPORTS FROM OUR NATION'S EMBASSIES OF UNBLINKING ***DISASTER*** ON A GLOBAL SCALE. SPRING GALAS HAVE BEEN UNDERATTENDED AT ***CATASTROPHIC*** LEVELS. THE MERE ***COURTESY*** OF AN R.S.V.P. SEEMS TO BE A THING OF THE ***PAST*** FOR SOME PEOPLE. AT LEAST FOUR OF OUR MOST ***FASHIONABLE*** ALLIES HAVE BEEN EXPRESSING ***DISTASTE*** WITH FAILED PEACE TALKS OR SOME SUCH. GOOD GRIEF, HAS EVERYONE LOST THEIR SENSE OF ***PROPORTION?*** AND IT DOESN'T STOP THERE. WE USED TO BE ABLE TO COUNT ON OUR OVERSEAS ***STATION AGENTS*** TO CLEAN UP THE LEFTOVER COLD CUTS. WELL, THE FEW THAT SHOWED UP KEPT LOOKING OVER THEIR ***SHOULDERS.*** MAYBE THEY DIDN'T WANT TO BE CAUGHT TAKING OVERLY LARGE SLICES OF THE ***PIE,*** HM?

THIS IS THE MOST REMARKABLE THING ***YET.*** THE U.S. OF A. HAS LATELY GOTTEN ITS ***FINGERS*** BURNED IN PLACES THEY'VE NEVER EVEN OFFICIALLY ***BEEN.*** AS A RESULT, OUR PREXY IS GETTING BLINDSIDED AS HIGH-LEVEL FOREIGN CHIT-CHAT GOES SOUR, AND THEN FINDS THE FINGERPRINTS ON MOST OF THE SCREW-UPS BELONG TO ***PEOPLE OF HIS OWN CHOOSING!*** TALK ABOUT YOUR CLASSIC DOUBLE-WHAMMY!! AND WHILE ***PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY*** HAS NEVER BEEN MORE ***HEAVILY*** INVOKED, I'M BETTING A COUPLE OF HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS AT THE C.I.A. ARE FEELING THE ***NOOSE*** TIGHTEN AROUND THEIR NECKS.

C'MON, ANDY, WE GO THROUGH THIS *EVERY TIME*. WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO *RELAX?*

I'M SORRY. I JUST WISH WE COULD DO THIS IN THE *DAYTIME.*

YEAH, WHATEVER. LOOK, YOU HEARD WHAT THOSE BUMS SAID THE OTHER DAY: "*THE RED GHOST LIVES IN DARKNESS.*"

THAT'S *GOTTA* BE *SPAWN.* HE'S LIKE SOME COOL CREATURE OF THE NIGHT NOW.

BESIDES, I'M PACKING MY BLADE. DON'T WORRY.

FOR ALL HIS BRAVADO, EDDIE FRANK ISN'T AS TOUGH AS HE TALKS. THOUGH HE--AND HIS ATTITUDE--GROWS TOUGHER EVERY DAY, HE'S STILL VERY MUCH A YOUNG BOY FROM A SMALL TOWN.

KISS

AMONG THEM: NO PERSON SHOULD ENTER 'RAT CITY' UNINVITED... FOR HIDDEN IN ITS DEEP SHADOWS ARE THINGS TO BE VERY AFRAID OF.

THERE ARE UNWRITTEN RULES THAT GUIDE NEARLY EVERY ACTIVITY OF THE HOMELESS AND OUTCAST.

EVEN THE MOST FEARLESS RISK RUNNING ACROSS THEIR OWN PERSONAL BOOGIE-MAN.

Gulp!

BEWARE.

FRAGILE

TAKE YOUR GAMES ELSEWHERE. THERE IS NO PLACE FOR CHILDREN IN THESE ALLEYS.

L-*LISTEN*, OLD MAN. WE'RE NOT LOOKING FOR ANY TROUBLE.

THEN YOU'RE IN THE WRONG PLACE.

WE'RE NOT VERY KIND TO TRESPASSERS. SO IT MUST BE SOMETHING QUITE IMPORTANT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.

S-*SPAWN*. THAT'S WHAT HE CALLED HIMSELF. AT LEAST HE DID THE LAST TIME WE MET.

I KNOW OF HIM. HE DOESN'T HAVE MANY FRIENDS. IS THAT WHAT YOU ARE?

YOU COULD SAY THAT, YEAH.

PLEASE, HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP US.

KISS

DOWN THERE. ANOTHER TWO BLOCKS. YOU'LL FIND WHAT YOU'RE AFTER. BUT YOU MUST DO SO ON YOUR OWN. HE DOESN'T LIKE MUCH COMPANY.

SURE. WHATEVER. COOL.

IF YOU CAN SOMEHOW PENETRATE TO HIS HUMANITY, YOU'LL HAVE ACCOMPLISHED MUCH.

GOOD LUCK.

NOT MOVING, COGLIOSTRO STARES, THEN MOTIONS THE BOYS TO FOLLOW. HE LEADS THEM THROUGH A MAZE FILLED WITH VILE ODORS THAT MAKE EDDIE AND ANDY CHOKE. THEN, THE WIZENED MAN STOPS.

WITH YOUTHFUL ENTHUSIASM, THEY VENTURE ON... UNAWARE THAT COGLIOSTRO KNEW EXACTLY WHY THEY'RE HERE. HE WAS TESTING THEM.

BECAUSE THE NIGHTMARE THEY'VE JUST WALKED INTO IS REAL--

--LITTERED WITH GROTESQUE PIECES OF EVIL'S FAILED SERVANTS--

--WHOSE FATE IS TO BE LUMPED TOGETHER WITH A HUNDRED MORE LOST SOULS IN A LOATHSOME CONSTRUCT MEANT TO **COMFORT** TO HELL'S LATEST OFFICER-IN-TRAINING.

YET, GIVEN THE NEGLIGIBLE IMPACT OF THEIR CRIMES, THIS MAY BE HARSHER THAN THEY DESERVE.

THIS IS WHERE THE NEW SHADOW KING NOW LIVES.

HIS *AURA* RESONATES WITH ALL WHO HAVE AN AFFINITY FOR SIN...

...PARANOIA...

...AND FEAR.

KIS

MOMENTS LATER...

HOLY...!

LOOK-- IT'S SOME KINDA *THRONE*, I THINK. THAT MEANS HE MUST *LIVE* AROUND HERE.

GROSS! I'M GONNA PUKE.

QUIT ACTING LIKE A BABY.

*THEN, BOTH HEAR A RUSTLING FROM BEHIND. AT FIRST THEY ASSUME IT'S THE **WIND.** BUT, AS A CHILLING **SHADOW** ENGULFS THEM, THEY WHISPER FRANTIC PRAYERS.*

ASKING FOR PROTECTION.

*HOPING FOR A **MIRACLE.***

GOD DELIVERS ONE.

SHOOP

SPAWN!

IT'S YOU!

MAN, YOU HAD US SCARED THERE FOR A MINUTE. I THOUGHT YOU WERE ANOTHER OF THOSE FREAKY HOME-LESS DUDES. WHAT A BUNCH OF LOSERS.

ANYWAYS, HOW YOU BEEN? THIS PLACE IS REALLY WICKED, YOU KNOW? I BET YOU SCARE THE CRAP OUT OF EVERYONE, unh? WITH ALL THIS CORPSE STUFF. AND WE SAW ALL THE BLOOD SMEARED ALONG THE WALLS. ANDY HERE WAS A BIT SCARED.

WAS NOT.

WHO ARE YOU TWO?

IT'S US. DON'T YOU REMEMBER? THE ONES FROM ALABAMA. EDDIE AND ANDY.

SO WHAT'D YOU DO, RUN AWAY FROM YOUR FATHER?

SORTA. ANDY KILLED HIM. HE MADE THE HURTING STOP.

THAT'S RIGHT. THE SONUVABITCH DESERVED IT. YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE LOOK IN HIS EYES AFTER YOU PUT THEM *TATTOOS* ALL OVER HIM*. HE WAS GOING TO RIP US APART.

SO AFTER I DID HIM, THE SOCIAL WORKERS PUT US WITH FOSTER PARENTS, A BUNCH OF STRICT HOLY ROLLERS.

*ISSUE 29--Tom.

YEAH. SO ANDY BURNED THEIR HOUSE BY ACCIDENT. THE JUDGE SAID WE WERE BAD. HE DIDN'T KNOW HOW POPPA BEAT US. NO ONE DID. HIS POLICE FRIENDS DIDN'T LIKE US TALKING ABOUT IT. NO ONE WANTED TO LISTEN TO LIARS, THEY SAID.

THEY SENT US TO KIDS' JAIL.

YOU WHAT?

LET ME *TELL* YOU SOMETHING, SPAWN. ANDY'S BEEN TALKING ABOUT YOU EVERY NIGHT YOU'VE BEEN GONE. DREAMING ABOUT SEEING YOU AGAIN.

I PROMISED HIM WE'D LOOK FOR YOU. WE DID. SO WHAT DO YOU WANT? FOR US TO BEG?

WE KEPT WAITING FOR YOU TO COME GET US, Mr. SPAWN. BUT YOU NEVER CAME. WHY?

DIDN'T MATTER. WE GOT OUT ANY-WAYS. CAME ALL THIS WAY TO SEE YOU. NOW WE'RE GOING TO *STAY* WITH YOU.

YOU'RE NOT MY PROBLEM.

PROBLEM?!

ARE YOU *CRAZY?!* WE DIDN'T ASK YOU TO DRIVE OUR DAD NUTS. WE WERE DOING FINE BEFORE YOU SHOWED UP. BUT YOU MADE ME HAVE TO *KILL* MY *DAD!* THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT. NOW OUR WHOLE *LIVES* ARE SCREWED UP.

FORGET IT! LET'S GET OUTTA HERE, ANDY!

No!

I'M NOT GOING BACK WITH YOU AND SNAKE! HE'S NOT GOOD, MAKING YOU DO ALL THAT STUFF! WE NEED TO STAY HERE.

DIDN'T YOU *HEAR* HIM, BOZO? WE WASTED OUR TIME. *SPAWNIE BOY* HERE DOESN'T GIVE A RAT'S ASS ABOUT US! *NO ONE* DOES. HE'S JUST LIKE *DAD.* SO LET'S GET BACK. I'VE GOT *WORK* TO DO.

No! *STOP IT!* DON'T *TOUCH* ME! I'M NOT GOING!

LEAVE HIM ALONE.

FINE, SUIT YOUR-SELF. YOU WANT TO LIVE WITH SOME FAGGOT VAMPIRE, GO AHEAD. I'M TIRED OF ALWAYS BABYSITTING YOU, ANYWAYS.

EDDIE...?

POOPHF POOPHF

HEY, TOUGH GUY, WHERE YOU BEEN. YOU'RE LATE.

OUT.

THAT'S GOOD. BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR PICK-UPS? BRIAN ROMANICK PHONED. SAID YOU NEVER SHOWED UP.

FRAGILE

SONY

LIKE I SAID. I WAS OUT.

LISTEN, EDDIE, MAYBE I HAVEN'T MADE MYSELF VERY ***CLEAR***. WHEN I SEND YOU FOR A PICK-UP, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT YOU DO, GOT IT? THAT MEANS ***NO*** SIDE TRIPS UNTIL YOU'RE FINISHED.

HEY, WHERE'S LITTLE ANDY?

GONE.

GONE TO SPEND THE REST OF HIS LIFE WITH SOME LOSER NAMED SPAWN.

WHAT'D YOU SAY?

I GOT PEOPLE ***PISSED*** RIGHT NOW 'CAUSE OF YOU. WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH YOU AND--

SPAWN! YOU KNOW, YOUR CITY'S VERSION OF BATMAN. WE MET HIM ABOUT A YEAR AGO.

YOU'RE MESSED UP, KID.

SHUT UP!

YOU WANT ME TO BELIEVE YOU ***VISITED*** THIS SPAWN TONIGHT?

BELIEVE WHAT YOU WANT. DON'T BUG ME.

KID, LOOK AT *ME!* YOU TELLING THE TRUTH?

I'M TELLING THE TRUTH.

SNAKE! HE'S *LYING.* *NO ONE* KNOWS WHERE...

QUIET!

USE YOUR BRAIN FOR A SECOND. EDDIE, HERE, HASN'T LET HIS BROTHER OUT OF HIS SIGHTS *ONCE* SINCE THEY GOT TO NEW YORK. THEY'RE *INSEPERABLE.* YET HERE HE SITS WITHOUT HIM LIKE EVERYTHING'S OKAY. THAT *INDICATES* SOMETHING.

ANDY, YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW THIS BUT SPAWN JUST *HAPPENS* TO BE ONE OF OUR *DROPS*. PROBLEM IS, WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO *FIND* HIM OF LATE. I'LL GIVE YOU AN EXTRA *TWENTY* IF YOU CAN DROP A PARCEL OFF TO HIM, TOMORROW.

SURE. WHY NOT, HE THINKS. PLUS, THEN HE CAN SEE IF HIS BROTHER IS STILL COPING.

DON'T LOSE HIM.

SNAKE AND HIS GANG FOLLOW, THROUGH INFECTIOUS FILTH, INTO THE LABYRINTH...

...UNAWARE THAT THEY, WHO PURSUE YOUNG EDDIE, ARE THEMSELVES BEING WATCHED.

FOR THE BOWERY LIVES BY ITS OWN UNSPOKEN LAWS.

EASY NOW, MY FRIENDS. THIS IS NOT OUR CONCERN.

JUST AS WE LET THOSE TWO CHILDREN PASS LAST NIGHT, SO WE MUST LET *THESE* OUTSIDERS MAKE THEIR WAY.

FORCES BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION ARE AT WORK NOW. FATE IS ABOUT TO PLAY ANOTHER OF ITS PERVERSE HANDS.

SO HOW DO YOU WANT THIS HANDLED?

LIKE USUAL. LET ME TAKE THE POINT. WHEN WE GET TO WHERE SPAWN IS, I'LL NEED YOU TO COVER MY FLANKS.

THEN WE'LL BLOW *AWAY* HIS SORRY *ASS*.

I'M *TIRED* OF HIM COSTING ME BUSINESS. EVER SINCE HE ARRIVED MY SCORES HAVE BEEN NERVOUS. BUT NO ONE'S BEEN ABLE TO GET A BEAD ON HIM.

"THANKS TO OUR NEW RECRUIT, THAT'S ABOUT TO CHANGE."

I'M LOOKING FOR MY BROTHER. WHERE IS HE?

LEAVE ME ALONE.

ANSWER THE QUESTION AND I WILL.

THE SKITTISH FORMER HOSTAGE IS HASSLED BY EDDIE FOR TEN MINUTES. HE REVEALS NOTHING.

THEN SCREW YA. I DON'T...

I'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE, BOY.

SNAKE?!

I'M GOING TO MAKE THIS VERY SIMPLE. BY THE COUNT OF ***THREE,*** IF YOU HAVEN'T FRIGGIN' TOLD ME WHERE SPAWN IS, YOUR ***BRAINS*** ARE GOING TO BE DECORATING THAT ***WALL***.

SEE, ME AND MY ASSOCIATES DON'T TAKE KINDLY TO YOUR HERO'S ACTIVITIES.

AIN'T THAT RIGHT, FELLAS?

FELLAS...?

JIMMY!! SANCHEZ! WHERE ***ARE*** YOU?

KLINK

uh?

SNAKE, WHY'RE YOU DOING THIS?

SHUT ***UP***, EDDIE!

OKAY, HERO. SHOWTIME'S OVER.

BROTHER?

C'MERE, KID!

GHHK!

SHOW YOURSELF, FREAK, BEFORE I WASTE THIS KID. SANCHEZ, JIMMY, GET READY!!

YOUR FRIENDS WON'T BE MUCH HELP. I'VE ALREADY SEEN TO THAT.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.

SUCK ME! YOU GODDAMN SPOOK!

BAM

BAM BAM

THREE SHOTS HIT WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN A CHEST. THE REALITY IS SOMETHING FAR MORE FRIGHTENING.

CHRIST! WHERE'D THOSE COME FROM?!

THEN, FROM BEHIND...

PUT MY BROTHER DOWN!

INSTINCTIVELY, THE MADMAN REACTS.

BAM

BAM

ANDY? NO! I'LL KILL YOU, SNAKE!

IT WAS MEANT AS A THREAT-- NOTHING MORE-- AS THE SITUATION EXPLODES--

-- AS FATE PLAYS ITS TRUMP CARD, THROWING THINGS OFF-BALANCE.

LITERALLY.

HE'S GOING TO NEED A DOCTOR.

SURE.

WE NEED TO HURRY, THOUGH, PLEASE. HE'S HURT BAD.

IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY, ANDY. YOU JUST LAY NICE AND STILL NOW.

I KNOW PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP.

I'M SO SORRY THIS HAPPENED. I MEANT TO PROTECT YOU. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LEFT YOU.

I PROMISED MOM YOU'D A-ALWAYS BE SAFE.

SUMMONING A FEW OF HIS LOYAL FOLLOWERS, SPAWN GIVES ORDERS.

THE NEAREST CARE CENTER IS ONLY A FEW BLOCKS AWAY. NURSES THERE HAVE LEARNED NOT TO ASK MANY QUESTIONS. INSTEAD, THEY HEAL THE UNDER-PRIVILEGED, COMFORTING BOTH PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL PAIN.

HOURS LATER, THE CHILDREN RETURN.

THEY SAID IT WAS MOSTLY A FLESH WOUND. NOT MUCH DAMAGE, THOUGH. HE'S GOING TO HAVE HIS ARM IN A SLING FOR A FEW WEEKS.

I WISH YOU COULD COME WITH US, MISTER SPAWN.

SO DO I, ANDY.

BUT, JUST LIKE WITH YOU, RUNNING AWAY WON'T SOLVE MY PROBLEMS, EITHER.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES.

AS THEY TURN TO GO, HE WANTS TO SAY SO MUCH MORE TO THEM. HE REMAINS SILENT.

A FEW DAYS LATER, THEY ARRIVE BACK IN FLORENCE. THE STAFF AT THE JUVENILE CENTER ARE STARTLED THAT THEY'VE RETURNED VOLUNTARILY.

BOTH WILL RECEIVE THE STANDARD LECTURES AS WELL AS HAVING MANY OF THEIR PRIVILEGES TEMPORARILY REVOKED.

WHEN THE OTHER YOUTHS BEGIN TAUNTING THEM AGAIN, THE SOON TIRE OF IT BECAUSE THEY ARE DRAWING NO REACTION.

AND THOUGH NO ONE MENTIONS IT ALOUD, THEY ALL SENSE THAT ANDY AND EDDIE HAVE **CHANGED**--

--BECOME MORE **DISTANT**. THEY SEE IT IN THEIR **EYES**.

AND SINCE THE TWO BOYS HAVE TAKEN A VOW OF **SILENCE**, THE OTHERS CAN DO LITTLE BUT WONDER.

WHAT BAFFLES THE COUNSELORS EVEN FURTHER IS HOW A COUPLE OF DECENT SMALL-TOWN KIDS COULD CHANGE, IN SUCH A SHORT TIME, INTO COLD, EMOTIONLESS INDIVIDUALS WITH THE CAPACITY FOR **MURDER**...

...AND WHAT COULD HAVE STRIPPED THEM OF THEIR **INNOCENCE** AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE.

SPAWN

Capulla '97

McFARLANE C.W.

IT'S BEEN SAID THAT WE SHALL EACH REAP WHAT WE SOW. EVENTUALLY, THERE WILL OCCUR A **BALANCE** BASED ON THE CHOICES AND ACTIONS WE MAKE IN LIFE.

WHATEVER IS THEN CARRIED OUT UPON US AT DEATH IS NOT JUDGMENT, BUT **SENTENCING**...

... FOR GOD IS MERELY FACILITATING OUR **SELF-DETERMINED** FATE...

... HAVING ALLOWED EACH OF US TO BE **OUR OWN MASTERS.**

TO BE IN CONTROL OF OUR DESTINIES.

WITH A MILLION PATHS TO CHOOSE FROM, ONLY **ONE** THING GUIDES US:

GUILT. THE INNER VOICE WE IGNORE AT OUR **PERIL**...

...THE VOICE WHICH, FOR SOME, LEADS TO THE CREATION OF A PERSONAL HELL.

SLEEP TIGHT, ANGEL.

YAWN!

MAN, I DON'T KNOW WHY I FEEL SO RESTLESS TONIGHT.

SHINE

O'J

SELL BY

TERRY!

JEEZ-US!

WH-WHAT'RE YOU *DOING* HERE?!

DELIVERING A MESSAGE.

I'M GETTING RESTLESS, SITTING AROUND WAITING FOR YOU TO TELL ME WHEN I CAN MOVE AGAINST WYNN. LET'S PUT A FINISH TO THIS.

I'M WORKING ON IT.

NOT FAST ENOUGH. MAJOR FORSBERG ISN'T RESPONDING THE WAY YOU THOUGHT. SO IT'S TIME FOR A PLAN 'B'. SEE, I DON'T **LIKE** MY IDLE TIME. CRAZY THINGS HAPPEN. **INNOCENTS** GET HURT. BECAUSE OF ME AND MY EXISTENCE.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

SO WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?

SPEED THINGS UP. DETOX FORSBERG. **ANYTHING!** I'M TIRED OF LIVING THIS NIGHTMARE WHILE YOU'RE SLEEPING WITH **MY** WIFE.

YOU ***BACK OFF,*** ***AL!*** THIS HAS ***NOTHING*** TO ***DO*** WITH WANDA. I'M PUSHING AS HARD AS I CAN. WE JUST NEED TO BE A LITTLE ***MORE*** PATIENT.

YOU'VE CHANGED SO MUCH, AL. WHY?

DON'T I? YOU TELL THAT TO A COUPLE OF KIDS I MET. ONE HAS A BULLET HOLE IN HIM. THE OTHER IS A **MURDERER.***

*LAST ISSUE --Tom.

WE **BOTH** HAVE. THE DIFFERENCE IS, AFTER WYNN'S DEAD, **YOUR** LIFE BECOMES NORMAL AGAIN.

TERRY? WHAT'RE YOU DOING?

WANDA!

YOU *LIKE* STANDING IN THE DARK TALKING TO YOUR-SELF?

CLICK

MYSELF...?!

whew

I'M JUST, um, PRACTICING FOR A SPEECH I'M GIVING THIS MORNING.

*THE REMAINDER OF THE NIGHT IS MARKED BY AN **UNEASINESS** THAT ALLOWS TERRY LITTLE REST... AND THEN SUDDENLY, IT'S MORNING.*

SORRY TO *RUSH*, SWEETIE, BUT I'VE GOT TO--

-- GIVE A BIG SPEECH. I KNOW.

Uh, YEAH.

GO WORK NOW, DA-DA?

THAT'S RIGHT. NOW GIVE ME A KISS, CYAN.

AND DON'T FORGET TO UNTIE YOUR MOM BEFORE I GET HOME.

BYE-BYE.

I'LL BE BACK AROUND SIX.

AS HER HUSBAND DRIVES AWAY, WANDA GAZES AT CYAN'S BEAMING SMILE... THINKS HOW HER DAUGHTER HAS BE-COME 'DADDY'S GIRL' OF LATE.

AFTER BREAKFAST, THE DAY'S EVENTS BEGIN. SOME DEAL WITH THE CHILDRENS' NEW HOSPITAL WING HER VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION IS IN THE MIDST OF FINANCING.

OTHER TASKS-- LIKE RESTOCKING THE FRIDGE-- AREN'T QUITE AS COMPLICATED AND ARE **MUCH** MORE FUN.

THIS IS WHAT HAS BECOME IMPORTANT TO HER --

-- AFTER TOO MANY MONTHS OF THE SAME OLD GRIND AT THE LAW OFFICES, DRAGGING CASES OUT SO THAT THE FIRM WOULD HAVE MORE BILLABLE HOURS.

WHEN HER FIRST HUSBAND DIED, IT SEEMED TO PUT THINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE.

GETTING HER SMILE BACK AND RAISING A FAMILY WERE AT THE TOP OF HER LIST.

RAISING... GUIDING THE CHILD SHE SO DESPERATELY PRAYED FOR. THERE WAS A TIME WHEN NONE OF THIS WAS POSSIBLE.

SHE ACCEPTED THAT.

HER LATE HUSBAND WASN'T ABLE TO HELP CONCEIVE A CHILD. THAT HAUNTED HIM. EVERY DAY.

FOR HE FELT HIS GREATEST FAILURE WAS IN NOT BEING ABLE TO GIVE HIS WIFE WHAT SHE WANTED MOST.

TORTURED BY THAT FACT, HE THOUGHT HIMSELF LESS OF A MAN. IT FOCUSED HIS INTENSITY INTO HIS WORK. PUSHING HIM TO BECOME THE GOVERNMENT'S **MOST** ELITE KILLING MACHINE.

A 'TRUE SOLDIER' IS WHAT HE LIKED TO CALL HIMSELF... UNTIL THE DAY HIS LIFE WAS CUT SHORT.

AT HIS GRAVE-SITE, WANDA PRAYED THAT HIS TORMENTED SOUL HAD FINALLY FOUND PEACE UNDER GOD'S CAREFUL WATCH.

THAT BELIEF HELPS HER SLEEP AT NIGHT.

THE **REALITY** IS NOTHING LESS THAN **DISTURBING.**

AL SIMMONS HAS BEEN **TRANSFORMED** INTO ONE OF **HELL'S UNDEAD.** THOUGH IT APPEARS IN HUMAN FORM, HIS NEW NECROPLASMIC BODY IS ANY-THING **BUT.**

PAIRED WITH AN EMBLEMATIC **SYMBIOTE** THAT ACTS AS BOTH ARMOR AND CARE-GIVER, HELL'S NEW AGENT HOLDS SWAY OVER THE EVIL AURA WHICH PERMEATES EACH NIGHT.

THIS UNHOLY CONNECTION TO OTHER CONDUITS OF SIN NOW ORDERS THEM TO ENGULF ITS VICTIM WHEN CONSCIOUSNESS APPEARS CLOSE.

TO **CLOG** EVERY ORIFICE, CONSTRICTING OXYGEN FLOW-- RENDERING THE ENEMY COMPLETELY **HELPLESS.**

SINCE TIME FORGOTTEN HAS THE RITUAL BEEN REPEATED.

THOUGH IT ISN'T THE CYBERNETIC GORILLA THAT INTERESTS THE HELLSPAWN.

YOU HAVE SOMETHING I **WANT**, MAJOR. AND I'M TIRED OF WAITING.

SO WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO DO TO REACH INSIDE THAT FRAIL BRAIN OF YOURS, I SUGGEST YOU DO IT **NOW**.

BECAUSE, **WITH** OR **WITHOUT** YOUR HELP, I'M TAKING JASON WYNN DOWN. IT'S JUST A MATTER OF WHETHER YOU WANT TO MAKE THIS ANY **EASIER** ON **YOURSELF**.

YOU KNOW WHY? BECAUSE EVERYTHING YOU SEE NOW... ALL THIS THAT YOU'RE AFRAID OF... HAPPENED BECAUSE OF **HIM**. HE **CREATED ME** JUST LIKE HE DESTROYED **YOU**. AND WE'RE JUST TWO OF **THOUSANDS**.

HE'S **STOLEN** FROM US. ANYTHING WE **CARED** FOR BECAME A **TARGET**. JUST LIKE YOUR **FAMILY**.

SO, YOU'VE GOT **EXACTLY** THREE HOURS TO COME TO YOUR SENSES. THAT'S WHEN I'LL BE BACK.

THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO DO **FIRST**.

FORSBERG STARES AS SPAWN STEPS BACK INTO THE BLACK ABYSS OF SURROUNDING SHADOWS. THEY APPEAR TO DEVOUR HIM WHOLE AS THE ICY BLACKNESS BLANKETS HIS FORM, LEAVING A PAIR OF GLOWING GREEN SLITS AS THE ONLY EVIDENCE THAT HELL'S GRIM REAPER HAD BEEN THERE AT ALL.

IN A BLINK, **THEY** VANISH. SO TOO DO THE SOUNDS OF SNAPPING **CHAINS** AND LEATHERY **CLOAK.**

MAJOR FORSBERG COLLAPSES IN THE REFUSE, KNOWING THAT, **SOMEHOW,** THE HELLSPAWN IS THERE NO LONGER.

AS WASHED-OUT CLOUDS OF GREY SCATTER ACROSS MANHATTAN'S SILHOUTTED CONSTRUCTS, A WINGED SHAPE APPEARS TWELVE BLOCKS EAST. IT MOVES WITH A **PURPOSE**-- A **HUNGER**-- TO **DESTROY** THOSE WHO **TOOK** FROM HIM.

HE IS HAUNTED BY THE IMAGES OF INNOCENTS WHOSE **SOULS** HAS TAINTED... HAS UNWITTINGLY PLANTED THE SEED OF **EVIL**.

IT'S TIME TO END THE MADNESS.

SPECIFICALLY, EGYPT AND ISRAEL.

ON ANOTHER MATTER, MATSON IN DIVISION 12 HAS ASKED ME TO DELIVER THIS TO YOU.

WHAT IS IT?

THE RESULTS OF HIS PROBE FOR INTERNAL SECURITY BREACHES. HE SAID YOU'D KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR.

WELL ***WELL***. ISN'T ***THIS*** A SURPRISE. ONE OF MY NEW RECRUITS HAS BEEN PUTTING IN A LITTLE UNSUPERVISED ***OVERTIME***.

SECURED ACCESS

GLOBAL SEARCH

E: ACCESS TO

NVOICES / TRANSFERS

ARMAMENTS: MI

» REQUEST VIA ACCESS CODE AS

» ASA-923777 ID: FITZGERALD, T

» WORK STATION ACCESS, RESIDENCE AC

» SECURITY FOLLOW-UP OVERRIDDEN

FITZGERALD? ISN'T HE RIGHT HERE IN ***YOUR*** DIVISION, SIR?

UNBELIEVABLE.

GET ME A RECORD OF EVERY TIME HE'S USED HIS CLEARANCE ON-LINE SINCE HE ARRIVED. THEN, CROSS-REFERENCE WITH OUR DATABASES TO SEE WHICH WERE ACCESSED AT THE SAME TIME. MY GUESS IS, WE'VE JUST FOUND OUR LEAK...

...***AND*** THE REASON FOR ALL THOSE 'COINCIDENTAL' ***DISASTERS***.*

*ISSUES 55 AND 56 -- Tom.

WOW! THAT'S SURE A PRETTY SUN, CYAN.

TANKS.

YOU'RE WELCOME, SWEETY.

MOMMA?

YES.

THIS LULLO CRAYON?

NOPE. THAT'S A RED ONE. NOT YELLOW.

Oh.

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU COULD DRAW SO GOOD. MAYBE WE SHOULD TAPE IT TO THE FRIDGE AND SHOW DADDY WHEN HE GETS HOME.

MAKE MOON, TOO?

THAT'S A GOOD IDEA. REMEMBER, JUST LIKE A BIG BANANA.

TWO RINGS LATER, IN ANOTHER ROOM...

HELLO.

HELLO?

SILENCE. NO TONE. NOTHING. IT'S AS IF THE LINE IS DEAD.

WHATEVER.

CYAN?

YOU FINISHED WITH YOUR...?

ARE YOU PLAYING *TRICKS* ON MOMMY AGAIN?

♪ I'M GONNA *GET* YOU! ♪

NOPE. NOT *THERE.*

A QUICK SEARCH. THE USUAL SPOTS TURN UP EMPTY.

CYAN!

MOMMY'S GETTING MAD. I NEED YOU TO COME *HERE,* PLEASE.

THOUGH THERE AREN'T ANY GOOD HIDING PLACES IN HER DAUGHTER'S ROOM, CYAN HAS BEEN KNOWN TO PUT HER BACK AGAINST THE FAR WALL WHILE COVERING HER EYES, THINKING NO ONE CAN SEE WHERE SHE IS.

THE PARENTS LIKE TO PLAY ALONG.

IT'S TIME TO COME **OUT,** CYAN. THE GAME'S OVER.

CYAN...?

FEAR.

LIKE A DEATH GRIP, IT SQUEEZES WANDA'S HEART--

-- WHILE SHE'S STARED DOWN-- **PIERCED** -- BY HELL'S EVIL LEER.

A BLUR OF CRIMSON STREAKS FORWARD.

THEN, ALL GOES BLACK.

FOR A LONG, LONG TIME.

I T-*TOLD* YOU, WE WERE JUST COLORING. I DIDN'T HEAR ANYTHING.

HOW DO YOU THINK HE GOT IN? THERE'S NO EVIDENCE OF FORCED ENTRY.

I DON'T KNOW. THE FRONT DOOR, MAYBE.

YOU SAID YOU KEPT THAT DOOR LOCKED.

I *DID*. WHEN THE PHONE RANG, I WASN'T WATCHING.

Oh GOD MY BABY I'M SORRY

CHAK

AND HOW LONG DID THAT TAKE?

A MINUTE, MAYBE. NO ONE WAS ON THE OTHER LINE.

DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE ANY IDENTIFYING MARKS? SCARS?

Um... SHE HAS A BIRTHMARK ACROSS HER TUMMY. IT'S FAIRLY NOTICEABLE.

Klink Klank

NOW, ABOUT THIS *SPAWN*. WHY DO YOU THINK HE'D WANT TO KIDNAP YOUR DAUGHTER?

=: Sob :=

I DON'T *KNOW*. HE... HE ONCE HELPED SAVE MY HUSBAND*. BUT THE LAST TIME HE WAS HERE, HE...

YOU MEAN THIS WASN'T HIS FIRST VISIT? DID YOU EVER REPORT THIS?

NO.

WHY NOT?

*ISSUE 24 --Tom.

NNZZ

AS THE QUESTIONING PROCEEDS, IT WAVERS BETWEEN COMPASSION AND ACCUSATION, STOPPING ONLY WHEN WANDA IS EMOTIONALLY OVERWHELMED.

WE APOLOGIZE FOR HOW *LONG* THIS IS TAKING, MS. BLAKE, BUT WE WANT TO BE SURE WE'RE COVERING ALL THE BASES.

IT'S ALL RIGHT. I'LL BE FINE. I JUST... I WANT MY BABY BACK.

WE UNDER-STAND.

SHE'S ALMOST *THREE*. I THINK I TOLD YOU THAT ALREADY. ALL SHE TALKED ABOUT YESTERDAY WAS HER *BIRTHDAY*. THE CAKE. THE BALLOONS. HOW SHE WANTED TO WEAR HER PRETTY DRESS.

I PROMISHED SHE COULD WEAR IT. NOW SHE'S *GONE*. MY GOD, WE HAVE TO GET HER *BACK*. P-*PLEASE*. SHE NEEDS HER *MOMMY*.

WANDA!!

HAVE THEY *FOUND* HER YET? DO THEY KNOW WHERE SHE *IS?!*

TERRY! THANK GOD YOU'RE HOME.

ARE YOU THE HUSBAND?

YES.

YOUR WIFE SAID SHE DIDN'T GIVE YOUR SECRETARY ANY DETAILS. SO MAYBE YOU CAN HELP US.

FIRST, BY TELLING US WHAT YOUR RELATIONSHIP IS WITH THIS SO-CALLED '*SPAWN*'.

WHAT?!

DO YOU KNOW WHO HE IS? WHERE HE LIVES? WHY HE KEEPS COMING HERE?

I...

THE ALLEYS! BACK AROUND THE SHIPPING DOCKS IN THE CITY. I SAW HIM THERE BEFORE. AFTER HE SAVED MY HUSBAND. I'LL SHOW YOU WHERE.

ACTUALLY, HE'S ***MOVED.*** DEEPER INTO THE BACK STREETS. A PLACE CALLED ***RAT CITY.*** I'VE BEEN THERE. I CAN DRAW YOU A MAP.

EVENTUALLY, THE OFFICERS GO, LEAVING BEHIND A COUPLE STRUGGLING FOR ANSWERS TO THEIR OWN QUESTIONS.

WHY?! WHY DID HE TAKE OUR *GIRL?* WHO *IS* HE? ***DAMN IT!*** YOU'RE ***HIDING*** SOMETHING FROM ME!

*WHAT CAN HE POSSIBLY SAY? "YOUR DEAD HUSBAND IS **ALIVE.** TURNED INTO SOME SUPER CREATURE." HE NOW HAS HER CHILD BECAUSE OF-- WHAT--? JEALOUSY. REVENGE. IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. SO, RATHER THAN ADD TO HER AGONY RIGHT NOW, HE CHOOSES TO **HIDE** THE TRUTH.*

*SPAWN ISN'T WHAT'S IMPORTANT. IT'S **CYAN.** HE PRAYS SHE'S ALL RIGHT.*

*AS THE NIGHT GROWS DEEPER, POLICE FROM BOTH QUEENS AND MANHATTAN CO-ORDINATE THEIR EFFORTS BEFORE THEN **DESCENDING** ON THE TERRITORY OF THE **HOMELESS.***

LIKE HOWLING WOLVES CURSING THE MOON, THE WAIL OF SIRENS BUILDS.

THEN SUDDENLY **STOPS.**

FROM THE REAR OF POLICE VANS, MEN CLAD IN BLACK TECHNO GEAR POUR OUT.

SYSTEMATICALLY, THEY CANVASS THE BACKSTREETS NO SANE CITIZEN DARES EVER VISIT. THEIR MISSION, QUITE SIMPLY: FIND SOME VAMPIRIC NUTCASE KNOWN AS **SPAWN.**

AN EXTENSIVE DESCRIPTION WAS GIVEN TO EACH MAN. THEIR TARGET WOULD BE HARD NOT TO NOTICE.

FINDING HIM IS QUITE ANOTHER MATTER. THE BUMS ARE KNOWN TO HIDE THEIR SECRETS WELL.

AMONG THEM, WHEN NEED BE, A MAN CAN JUST UP AND **VANISH**--SO, ASKING THEIR COOPERATION IN EXPOSING THEIR KING WOULD BE POINTLESS.

INSTEAD, LIKE SILENT ROBOTS, THE TASK FORCE PENETRATES DEEPER.

SWAT

LICE

INTO THE HEART OF **RAT CITY.**

STUMBLING OVER THE GROTESQUE DETRITUS OF A HELLSPAWN'S EXISTENCE.

CHRIST.

AS THEY STARE AT THE UNHOLY SIGHT, THE YOUNGEST OF THE GROUP BEGINS TO CONVULSE.

WHAT KIND OF DEPRAVED CREATURE LIVES IN SUCH SQUALOR? ONLY THEIR PROTECTIVE MASKS KEEP THE MEN FROM GAGGING ON THE PUTRID, ACIDIC **STENCH**. ITS SOURCE IS THE ROTTING FLESH COMPRISING WHAT APPEARS TO BE A **THRONE** OF **HUMAN REMAINS**.

RATS AND **MAGGOTS** FEAST ON THE CHARNEL MOUND, GNAWING AWAY AT THE FEW REMAINING PARTS WITH MEATY FLESH.

AS THEY SLOWLY COME TO **ACCEPT** WHAT THEY SEE, ALL ARE UNAWARE THAT HE WHOM THEY NOW SEEK HAS BECOME ACUTELY AWARE OF **THEIR** PRESENCE...

... AND **WORSE**... IS ALREADY PREPARED FOR **WAR**.

WORST OF **ALL**, HE DOESN'T KNOW WHY **ANY** OF THIS IS **HAPPENING**.

THIS IS ACTUALLY FUN!

JUST DEPENDS ON YOUR INTERPRETA-TION.

WHAT YOU ARTLESS *HUMANS* SEE AS A SUN WITH RAYS OF LIGHT JUTTING OUTWARD, *I* SEE AS A *HEAD* BEING PIERCED BY A BUNCHA *NAILS*.

WHA'CHA *THINK*?

GOOD.

BUT *NOT* GREAT, hnh? YOU THINK YOU'RE SO DAMN *CLEVER*, DON'T YOU?

FINE!!

THEN GET BACK TO WORK. I WAS ONLY TRYING TO *HELP* YOU.

NO! I DON'T WANNA.

Tsk tsk!

YOU WANT THIS BACK, RIGHT? IT'S WHAT YOU'VE BEEN *CRY*ING FOR. WELL, *GET DRAWING*, THEN!

OKAY.

THIS IS GOING QUITE *SWIMMINGLY*, IF I *DO* SAY SO MYSELF.

I'M TIRED.

I WANT MY MOMMY.

CLANG

YEAH. WHATEVER.

YOU WANT TO GO TO BED THEN FINISH PAPERING THESE WALLS. I WANT ANOTHER ***FIFTY-THREE SKETCHES*** BEFORE I LET YOU SLEEP, UNDER-***STAND*** ME?

AND I DON'T ***GIVE A CRAP*** IF IT TAKES ALL NIGHT. THAT'S ***YOUR*** PROBLEM.

YOU LITTLE TWERP.

TO BE CONTINUED

image

60 APR DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

SPAWN WAS HERE

Capullo 97

McFARLANE CW

ASLEEP.

WANDA HAS, FOR THE MOMENT, FOUND UNWANTED RELIEF FROM HER WAKING **NIGHTMARE**... THE **ABDUCTION** OF **CYAN**, HER ONLY DAUGHTER.

WHEN THE POLICE CAME, SHE TOLD THEM EVERYTHING SHE COULD REMEMBER. BUT LONG AFTER THEIR DEPARTURE, HER MIND KEPT GNAWING AT THOSE MEMORIES, FRANTICALLY SEARCHING FOR A HIDDEN **CLUE**. SHE'D FORGOTTEN SOMETHING. SHE **HAD** TO HAVE. BECAUSE NONE OF THIS MAKES ANY SENSE.

AND THOUGH HER FOCUS WAS ON RETRIEVING EVERY IMPRESSION OF THOSE MOMENTS, SHE **STRAYED** FROM THE TASK WITH THOUGHTS OF HER LITTLE GIRL.

IS SHE **SAFE**?

IS SHE **HUNGRY**?

WHAT'S GOING THROUGH HER TWO-YEAR-OLD MIND?

WHY IS ANY OF THIS **HAPPENING**?!!

OVER AND OVER, WANDA RELIVED IT ALL, PRAYING FOR THE RETURN OF HER BABY.

FINALLY, EXHAUSTION **OVERWHELMED** HER.

LEAVING HER HUSBAND ALONE WITH A NAGGING **FEAR** THAT HE'S **INVOLVED**.

FEAR THAT THE MAN ONCE **MARRIED** TO WANDA-- ONCE HIS **BEST FRIEND**-- WHO DIED AND **CAME BACK TO LIFE**-- COULD ALSO BE THE **KIDNAPPER**.

DAMN YOU, AL.

NOW, IN THE HEART OF NEW YORK'S SPRAWLING MAZE OF ALLEYS, A **WAR** IS ABOUT TO BE WAGED.

POLICE

A SMALL ARMY OF POLICE SPECIALISTS IS PITTED AGAINST A MAN WHOSE **OWN** TRAINING, BEFORE HIS **DEATH**, WAS IN THE ART OF **KILLING**.

HE'D INTENDED TO FIGHT ELSEWHERE TONIGHT, AGAINST HIS FORMER BOSS **JASON WYNN**, AND THIS NEW THREAT SHOULDN'T BE MUCH OF A **DISTRACTION**--

--GIVEN THAT SPAWN IS **FULLY AWARE** OF HIS ENEMY, WHILE **THEY** ACT AS IF THEY'RE CHASING A **GHOST**.

SOMEONE THAT MIGHT NOT EVEN **EXIST**.

POLICE

HE'S ABOUT TO LET THEM KNOW THAT HE **DOES**.

NO!

HAVEN'T YOU LEARNED ANYTHING?!

GET YOUR HAND OFF ME.

WHY? WHAT WERE YOU GOING TO DO, KILL A COP IN COLD BLOOD?

THINK, MAN!

I DON'T HAVE TO. NOT WHEN IT COMES TO WAR.

SO THAT'S WHAT THIS IS? A ***WAR***?

WELL, I ***GUARANTEE*** THAT IF YOU TAKE OUT A COUPLE OF POLICE OFFICERS, YOU'LL ***GET*** YOUR UNHOLY BATTLE. EVERY COP IN THIS ***CITY*** WILL BE SWARMING INTO THIS ALLEY--

--TEARING EVERYTHING APART UNTIL THEY FIND YOU.

I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES.

I'M SURE YOU WILL. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ***REST*** OF US, WHO'LL BE CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE?

YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHY THEY'RE HERE, DO YOU?

DO YOU?!

NO.

FIND OUT!! ***THEN*** DO YOUR KILLING. BUT AT LEAST KNOW THE ***REASON*** YOU'RE WILLING TO MURDER.

FIND ANYTHING ELSE, GEORGE?

YOU MEAN THIS ISN'T *ENOUGH?*

CHRIST! I'VE BEEN AT THIS JOB TWENTY YEARS, AND *NOTHING* COMPARES TO *THIS*.

THERE MUST BE OVER A DOZEN BODIES IN THIS CHAIR. I MEAN, THIS GUY IS SITTING ON ROTTING *CORPSES,* IN THE THE MIDDLE OF SOME FRIGGIN' *GOO,* SURROUNDED BY *GARBAGE* AND *BUGS,* AND HE CALLS THIS *HOME...!*

SOMEONE IN THAT STATE OF MIND IS CAPABLE OF *ANY-THING*. WE NEED TO FIND THIS CREEP, AND *FAST!*

I DON'T EVEN WANT TO *THINK* WHAT HE'S PLANNING FOR THAT LITTLE GIRL.

SOMEONE CALL IN, TELL 'EM TO SEND TRANSPORT FOR THE GORILLA, AND LET THEM KNOW WE'RE GOING DEEPER INTO THIS MAZE.

I WANT EVERY COP THIS SIDE OF JERSEY TO HAVE A PICTURE OF ... WHAT'S THE KID'S NAME AGAIN?

CYAN.

RIGHT. CIRCULATE IT EVERY-WHERE.

DON'T MOVE A MUSCLE, SCUMBAG.

TMP

GUYS!! OVER HERE! I'VE GOT HIM!

IT'S THE SECOND TIME TONIGHT SPAWN HAS LET HIS GUARD DOWN.

CURSING HIMSELF, HE REFOCUSES HIS ANGER.

IT'LL BE TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE DOWNED OFFICER RETURNS TO WORK.

STARTLED COCKROACHES SCURRY CHAOTICALLY AS PUNGENT WATER DRIPS FROM CRACKS IN ANCIENT PIPES AND GUTTERS.

BELOW, A CHILD IS FINALLY ASLEEP, OVERTAKEN BY EXHAUSTION. SHE'S BEEN DEPRIVED OF BOTH FOOD AND WATER WHILE BEING FORCED TO DRAW **COUNT-LESS** SKETCHES, HOUR AFTER HOUR--

-- DRIVEN BY A **MANIAC** WHOSE ONLY PURPOSE IN ABDUCTING THE GIRL IS TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN HIS HATED ENEMY, **SPAWN**, AND THOSE WHO SURROUND HIM.

EVERYONE INVOLVED **BELIEVES** THE CLOAKED HERO IS TO BLAME. THEY ARE OBLIVIOUS TO A **CHANGELING** SENT FROM A FIERY PIT OF HELL.

YOU BIG **BABY!**

HERE! TAKE YOUR STUPID SUCKER THINGIE.

BUT... I'LL NEED TO MAKE A LITTLE **TRADE** FIRST. AND I DON'T GIVE A RAT'S ASS **HOW** COLD IT IS!

A LITTLE *PNEUMONIA* AIN'T GOING TO KILL YA.

... AND EVEN IF IT *DOES*, IT'S *YOUR* LOSS.

'CAUSE I'M GETTING *SICK* OF YOUR FRIGGIN' *CRYING*. ALWAYS WHINING FOR MOMMY... AND DADDY... AND FOOD...

FINE!

YOU'RE *HUNGRY*, I'LL *FIX* SOME-THING.

CHOMP CHOMP *slurp* CHOMP

PTOOEY!

WATCHING YOU LITTLE HUMANS CHOKE ON YOUR OWN VOMIT IS *ENLIGHTEN-ING*.

ESPECIALLY AFTER THE *POISON* TAKES EFFECT... *HE HE HE HE HEEE*

THINGS ARE GETTING ***COMPLI-CATED,*** MR. WYNN. THE SURVEILLANCE TEAM CAN'T GET CLOSE TO FITZGERALD'S HOME BECAUSE OF ALL THE POLICE ACTIVITY. IT MAY BE SOME TIME BEFORE OUR OPERATIVES CAN--

YES, I'VE HEARD.

MAKE SURE THAT FITZGERALD DOESN'T USE THIS DISTRACTION TO SLIP THROUGH ANY CRACKS. SO, WHAT ELSE DO YOU KNOW?

WE'VE VERIFIED THAT THE KIDNAPPER IS THE ONE WE KNOW AS ***SPAWN.*** HE SEEMS TO BE CARRYING OUT SOME PERSONAL VENDETTA, BUT DETAILS ARE SKETCHY. RIGHT NOW, THE ALLEYS ARE BEING COMBED BY THE COPS.

SEND OUT THREE UNITS TO MONITOR THE POLICE ACTIVITY. I WANT TO KNOW ***EXACTLY*** WHAT'S HAPPENING DOWN THERE.

YES, SIR.

I NEED TIME TO DEAL WITH TERRY MYSELF, SO I NEED TO BE SURE SPAWN WON'T BE MAKING A SUDDEN APPEARANCE.

I'M ***STILL*** NOT CLEAR ON WHAT CONNECTS THOSE TWO.

BUT, TRAITORS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. THE SAFETY OF THE GIRL IS NOT OUR FOCUS. WHAT ***IS,*** GENTLEMEN, IS FINDING OUT WHO ***ELSE*** FITZGERALD CONTACTED WITH THE STOLEN DATA.

THEN, TERMINATE THEM.

HE'D EXCUSED HIMSELF TO GO TO THE BATH-ROOM, ASKING WANDA IF SHE'D BE OKAY.

HE'S TRYING TO BE STRONG IN HIS WIFE'S PRESENCE...

...BUT TERRY ISN'T IMMUNE TO THIS TRAUMA, EITHER.

A SENSE OF DUTY HAS CAUSED HIM TO KEEP HIDING THAT FACT.

GOD, HELP ME.

?

YOU...!

WHERE'S MY GIRL? WHERE'D YOU TAKE HER?!

I DON'T CARE HOW MUCH YOU'VE CHANGED, I'LL **KILL** YOU BEFORE YOU...

BAM!

UH!

SHUT UP!

I JUST WANT MY GIRL BACK! YOU CAN HAVE WHATEVER ELSE YOU NEED!

ARE YOU CRAZY?!!

NOW YOU LISTEN TO ME, TERRY. I NEED TO KNOW WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON HERE. WHAT'S HAPPENED TO CYAN?

I DON'T HAVE HER! UNDERSTAND? IT WASN'T ME. NOW YOU CAN EITHER BELIEVE THAT AND HELP ME GET HER BACK OR DO NOTHING.

YOU'VE SEEN HOW I LIVE NOW. THE UNHOLY FORCES THAT MADE ME ARE CAPABLE OF ANYTHING! INCLUDING SHAPESHIFTING. YOUR CHILD IS JUST A TOY IN THEIR SADISTIC GAME. SO I NEED SOME ANSWERS!!

A FEW MOMENTS LATER...

TERRY!

THAT VOICE! IT WAS *HIM*, WASN'T IT? *SPAWN* WAS HERE!! DID HE BRING *CYAN* BACK?

WHAT ARE YOU *HIDING*?

DOWN THE HALL, A BLACK, LEATHERY HAND REMOVES A SPECIFIC ITEM.

. . . IN GENEVA AGREED TO INVESTIGATIONS INTO WHAT THEY CALLED "THESE DISRUPTIONS". BOTH SIDES PLEDGED TO WORK TOWARD RESUMPTION OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. THE PRESIDENT ISSUED A STATEMENT, CALLING THE TALKS A "PRIORITY OF THE HIGHEST ORDER, AN OPPORTUNITY TO PUT ASIDE SHORT-TERM INTERESTS AND SUSPICIONS IN FAVOR OF LARGER NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IDEALS."

IN THE BACKGROUND TO THE TENSIONS ARE ARMS SALES AGREEMENTS WHICH ARE BEING IGNORED, ACCORDING TO WELL-DOCUMENTED REPORTS. REBEL GROUPS, GENERALLY ARMING THEMSELVES WITH WEAPONS STOLEN FROM THE MILITARY, HAVE BEGUN RAIDING EACH OTHERS' CAMPS FOR INCREASINGLY SCARCE GUNS AND AMMUNITION, WHILE MILITARY BASES ON BOTH SIDES HAVE BEEFED UP SECURITY AROUND THEIR OWN ORDNANCE STOCKPILES.

ARMS MANUFACTURERS IN THE U.S HAVE DENIED KNOWLEDGE OF ANY DISRUPTIONS IN SHIPMENT DELIVERIES.

THE ***LIES!*** THE SCHEMES AND ***DUPLICITY!*** THERE'S JUST ***NOTHING*** LIKE BEING ON HAND WHEN GREAT NATIONS SIT DOWN TO MAKE NICE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

THE TOPIC ON ***EVERY***ONE'S MIND AT THESE PEACE TALKS IS THE SHORTAGE OF ***GUNS,*** AND THIS REPORTER HAS TO WONDER IF WE'RE ALL IN THE SAME ***REALITY.*** I'VE SEEN ***NO*** SHORTAGE OF ARMED MEN SINCE I ARRIVED AT THE CONFERENCE SITE HERE IN GENEVA. MAYBE IT'S JUST AN AFFECTATION OF THE LANGUAGE OF DIPLOMACY.

MEANWHILE, THE BUZZ BEHIND THE BUZZ HAS TO DO WITH A SHORTAGE OF, NOT GUNS, BUT ***UNIFORMS*** AMONG THE REBELS. IT SEEMS THESE NATIONS' ARMIES HAVE BEEN STORMING THE REBEL CAMPS TO STEAL THEIR WEAPONS ***BACK.*** THEY'VE BEEN HAVING THE ***WORST*** TIME TRYING TO DETERMINE IF THE DOORS THEY'RE BREAKING DOWN BELONG TO REBELS OR JUST BLACK MARKETEERS. ONE ***HATES*** TO APOLOGIZE UNNECESSARILY!

NOW HERE'S A GOOD ONE! ENTIRE CONTAINER SHIPS FILLED WITH MAYHEM DELIVERY SYSTEMS ARE VANISHING AND NO ONE IS WILLING TO SAY THE WORD ***"THEFT"!*** COULD IT BE THAT THE ADMINISTRATION IS UNAWARE OF THE CABAL OF ROGUE AGENTS ON ITS VERY ***PAYROLL?***

HEL***LO!*** IS ANYONE ***AWAKE?***

ISN'T IT TIME TO ASK SOME ***QUESTIONS*** OF THOSE BADLY-DRESSED GUYS WITH THE PASSPORTS AND THE BLACK BUDGET, THOSE ***CENTRALLY-INTELLIGENT AGENTS?*** THERE'S NO REASON TO ***DOUBT*** THAT IF OUR BUBBA CATCHES ONE OF HIS "BOYS' CLUB" PALS WITH HIS HAND IN THE INTERNATIONAL COOKIE JAR, WHY, HE'LL JUST COME RIGHT OUT AND ***TELL*** US, RIGHT?

WHAT A GREAT SYSTEM!

HE DOESN'T KNOW IF IT WILL WORK, BUT RIGHT NOW IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES SENSE--

--TO TRY TO CONNECT TO CYAN'S **AURA** VIA SOME PHYSICAL **OBJECT.**

THERE WERE **TWO THINGS** CYAN CLUNG TO LATELY. ONE WAS THE **STUFFED ANIMAL** NOW HELD TIGHTLY IN SPAWN'S GRASP.

THE OTHER: A **NECKLACE** MADE FROM AN OLD SOOTHER AND A SHOE-LACE SHE'D FOUND AT THE HOSPITAL DURING TERRY'S ILLNESS.

IT'S THE SAME SHOELACE THAT SPAWN WORE, STITCHED INTO HIS FACE, UNTIL RECENTLY.

OUR CRIMSON WARRIOR HOPES THAT, SINCE CYAN HAS A PIECE OF HIS PAST AND HE HAS A PIECE OF HERS, THERE EXISTS A BOND OF RESIDUAL INVESTED ENERGY THAT SHOULD **LINK** THE TWO.

MEANWHILE, THE AIR GROWS COLDER AS THE HOURS DRIFT AWAY.

YOU SAID YOU WERE *THIRSTY!* NOW TAKE IT!!

NO! *NO!* *NO!!* ME DON'T WANT.

I'M NOT ASKING YOU, BITCH! I'M *TELLING* YOU!! ***NOW DRINK IT UP!***

-- BEFORE I SHOVE IT DOWN YOUR SCRAWNY LITTLE...

SNIF SNIF

?

SOMETHING HAS JUST TRIGGERED CLOWN'S SENSES.

*OR, MORE CORRECTLY, **SOMEONE.***

GO AHEAD! ***TRY*** AND PROTECT HER. YOU'RE A BIGGER FOOL THAN I THOUGHT IF YOU THINK IT'LL ***LAST.***

SHE'S ***MINE,*** SPAWNIE OL' BOY. AND I DIDN'T SAY YOU COULD HAVE HER YET.

AS THE DEMONIC DWARF RANTS, SPAWN COMMANDS HIS LIVING OUTER SHELL:

"COMFORT THE CHILD."

IT OBEYS.

HE KNOWS HE SHOULD LEAVE. JUST GET CYAN TO SAFETY IMMEDIATELY. BUT HE'S GROWN TIRED OF THIS GAME. ALWAYS WAITING FOR HELL TO MAKE THE NEXT MOVE.

IT'S TIME THAT **STOPPED.**

LET'S END THIS. YOU WANT THE CHILD, THEN YOU COME GET HER. NOW!

BUT YOU'D BETTER BE READY TO **KILL** ME FIRST!

ALL IS QUIET FOR A MOMENT. THEN, LIKE SOME WAILING **BANSHEE**, THE CLOWN STARTS TO LAUGH.

LOUDER. AND **LOUDER.**

HE'S TAUNTING SPAWN.

IT WORKS.

KUGK!

SKOK!!

SAY YOUR PRAYERS, FAT BOY.

KLIK KLIK KLIK

WHAT'S THE MATTER? YOU THOUGHT I WAS JUST GOING TO STAND HERE AND LET YOU BLOW MY BRAINS OUT?

Tsk tsk tsk!

YOU AREN'T VERY *SHARP*, ARE YOU?

AFTER ALL, I COME FROM HELL *TOO*, CHAR-BABY. IT'S NOT BY ACCIDENT THAT MALEBOLGIA CHOSE *ME* TO BE YOUR SHADOW!

SO, AS GOOD AS YOU THINK YOU *ARE*, US *TRUE-BORNS* OF HELL HAVE POWERS YOU CAN'T EVEN *IMAGINE*.

PREOCCUPIED WITH HIS BOASTING, CLOWN DOESN'T SEE SPAWN'S COSTUME BEGIN TO RIPPLE UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE--

YAAGH!

--AS SPIKES DRIVE CLEAR THROUGH BOTH OF CLOWN'S ARMS. IN HIS RAGE, SPAWN DIRECTED HIS COSTUME INTO 'ATTACK' MODE. HIS ORDER HAS BEEN CARRIED OUT.

SO TOO DO THE **CHAINS** SERVE THEIR MASTER, EASILY CRUSHING THE WRISTS OF IT'S HOST'S ENEMY.

NOW, FOR THE **FIRST TIME** SINCE AL SIMMONS BECAME UNDEAD, HE'S MANIPULATING HIS COSTUME WITH CONVICTION.

WITH **PURPOSE.**

GNRR... SPTT!

I'VE BEEN PATIENT LONG ***ENOUGH***, YOU HUMAN SACK OF ***CRAP***.

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ABOUT MY ***TRUE*** FORM? YOU'VE ***NEVER*** BEEN A MATCH FOR THE VIOLATOR!

AS THE METAMORPHOSIS BEGINS, THE CONSTRAINTS BINDING CLOWN **ALSO** CHANGE.

RAZOR-SHARP LINKS LIMIT VIOLATOR'S GROWTH, PAINFULLY CUTTING INTO LEATHERY FLESH EACH TIME THE ATTEMPT IS MADE--

--SLICING THROUGH HELL-FORMED CARTILAGE AND TENDONS--

--FORCING THE CLOWN TO REMAIN IN HIS SADISTIC, BLOATED FORM.

YOUR REIGN OF TERROR IS OVER, FREAK. AND WHEN I'M THROUGH WITH YOU, WYNN AND CHAPEL ARE NEXT.

CHAPEL?

CHAPEL?!

YOU MORON. HE DIDN'T KILL YOU! Hee-hee... YOU MEAN AFTER ALL THIS YOU STILL DON'T KNOW WHO WHACKED YOU?!!

GOOD! THAT'LL BE ANOTHER QUESTION TO HAUNT YOU FOREVER WHILE YOUR SOUL ROTS IN HELL.

WELL, TAKE A GOOD, LONG LOOK AROUND, SPAWNIE, THEN, AFTER I KILL *YOU*, THE *KID* GETS SNUFFED IN *TWO SECONDS!*

THAK!

NO. **YOU** TAKE A LOOK.

SKCH

NECROPLASM SPATTERS THE GROUND AS THE BLOOD-COLORED CLOAK SWALLOWS CLOWN'S HEAD WHOLE.

SPAWN'S NEXT MOVE WILL COST HIM PRECIOUS ENERGY, INCHING HIS SOUL THAT MUCH CLOSER TO THE DEVIL'S GRASP.

ANY AIR SUPPLY IS CHOKED OFF WITH A VACUUM-LIKE SUCTION.

AL DOESN'T GIVE A DAMN.

HIS ANGER BEGS FOR RELEASE, A KIND OF SPIRITUAL ACID BATH.

WITH THAT DONE, HE TURNS HIS ATTENTION ELSEWHERE...

...TO ANOTHER SOUL, INNOCENT NO LONGER... NOW TAINTED BY HIS CURSE.

QUEENS. 4:47 A.M.

SLEEP HAS LATELY BECOME A DISTANT STRANGER TO THIS HOUSE.

Mom. Mommy.

MOMMA!

WANDA STEADIES HERSELF AGAINST THE DOOR JAMB. INVOLUNTARILY, SHE **SCREAMS**, ALERTING HER HUSBAND TO THE **MIRACLE** NOW PLACED BEFORE HER.

TEARS FLOW FREELY AS DAWN'S FIRST LIGHT BLANKETS THE FAMILY IN RADIANCE. IT'S A NEW DAY.

WANDA, SENSING A SUBTLE MESSAGE, KNOWS IN HEART THERE IS A **REASON** FOR HER CHILD'S SAFE RETURN.

SHE GIVES PRAISE TO THAT PROTECTOR.

Oh, THANK YOU, GOD. THANK YOU.

image
61
MAY
DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN

Capulla
McFARLANE

UNFORTU-NATELY, MS. BLAKE, WE DON'T HAVE ANY MORE ANSWERS THAN *YOU* DO.

I LEARNED A LONG TIME AGO...

...THAT LOGIC DOESN'T PLAY A BIG PART WHEN YOU'RE DEALING WITH *PSYCHOS*.

WELL, WHAT-*EVER* SPAWN'S RATIONALE WAS, IT'S *OVER*. YOUR CHILD IS BACK SAFE. THAT'S WHAT'S IMPORTANT NOW.

AND FOR THE TIME BEING, AT LEAST, SHE SEEMS TO BE ADJUSTING QUITE WELL.

SO HOW DO WE KNOW HE WON'T COME BACK *AGAIN*?

HONESTLY, WE *DON'T*.

BUT ONLY *VERY* RARELY WILL A KIDNAPPER HIT THE SAME PLACE TWICE. ESPECIALLY IF THEY'VE FAILED. IT'S BETTER FOR THEM TO MOVE ON, USUALLY OUT OF STATE.

HOW DO YOU *KNOW* HE FAILED?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

WE HAVE CYAN BACK, BUT NO ONE KNOWS *WHY* OR *HOW*.

I *UNDER-STAND* YOUR CONCERNS, BELIEVE ME. BUT SINCE YOUR CHILD IS *BACK*, OUR INVESTIGATION NOW SHIFTS TO TRACKING SPAWN DOWN...

... NOT PREVENTING HIS RETURN.

WE'LL BE WORKING WITH THE F.B.I. UNTIL HE'S LOCATED. BUT THESE THINGS CAN DRAG ON FOR *YEARS*. YOU'RE BEST OFF JUST GETTING ON WITH YOUR LIVES.

AND THE FACT THAT YOU HAD THE HOUSE UNDER SURVEILLANCE IS NOT VERY COM-FORTING SINCE HE CAN *STILL* JUST COME AND GO AT WILL.

"I WISH WE COULD OFFER YOU MORE SATISFACTION. IN THE MEANTIME, YOU HAVE MY NUMBER. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO GIVE ME A CALL IF YOUR DAUGHTER'S MOOD SHIFTS DRAMATICALLY.

LIKE A FUNERAL PROCESSION THEY DEPART, QUIETLY LEAVING NEARLY AS MANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS AS WHEN CYAN FIRST DISAPPEARED.

"I'LL PUT YOU IN TOUCH WITH PROFESSIONALS WHO CAN HELP."

THE NEIGHBORS WILL SOON WHIP THEMSELVES INTO A GOSSIPPING **FRENZY** OF MISINFORMED SPECULATION.

THIS IS UNIT 612. COULD YOU PASS ON TO OFFICER LEETCH THAT THE SURVEILLANCE TEAM ON THE FITZGERALD HOUSE HAS BEEN DISBANDED.

SO IS ACTIVATED A SECRET NETWORK THAT CHANNELS ALL CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION TO INTERESTED PARTIES.

AND THE GORILLA?

TAKEN CARE OF. **CY-GOR'S** BEEN TRANSPORTED TO THE NORRISTOWN CONTAINMENT FACILITY. HE'S UNDERGOING TESTS AS WE SPEAK.

WE STILL DON'T HAVE ANY IDEA HOW HE ENDED UP IN SPAWN'S ALLEYWAY. REPORTS INDICATE THAT, FOLLOWING HIS ESCAPE, CY-GOR HEADED PURPOSEFULLY TO NEW YORK. WE'RE STILL PROBING FOR THE CONNECTION.

AND FITZGERALD?

HE'S **WIDE OPEN**. OUR CONTACTS SAY THAT YOUR PEOPLE CAN CLOSE IN WITHOUT TRIPPING OVER THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

NO MOTIVATION HAS YET BEEN DETERMINED FOR SPAWN'S ACTIONS.

THEN MAKE THAT A PRIORITY. I'M BEGINNING TO **WEARY** OF HOW THIS LONE MAN IS **CONSISTENTLY** ABLE TO MANIPULATE EVENTS TO HIS WILL.

FIND HIM. THEN MAKE HIM ***DISAPPEAR***.

YOU SEEM TO BE QUITE HOT, SIR.

I CAN RELATE.

CLICK

TERRY AND WANDA WELCOME THE THOUGHT OF SLEEP NOT PLAGUED BY ANXIOUS NIGHTMARES.

C'MON, GRANNY. LET'S GET YOU TO BED. WE'VE MADE UP THE EXTRA ROOM FOR YOU.

THAT'S SO SWEET.

CYAN WILL BE SO EXCITED TO SEE YOU'RE STILL HERE IN THE MORNING.

NIGHT NIGHT, NANNA.

BLESS YOU, CHILD.

AFTER TOO MANY RESTLESS NIGHTS, A SENSE OF **NORMALITY** HAS BEEN RESTORED TO THE HOUSEHOLD.

CYAN IS NESTLED SAFELY, COM-FORTABLY **LOVINGLY** BETWEEN MOM AND DAD--

-- EACH A SOOTHING BALM TO THE EMOTIONAL WOUNDS THEY'VE **ALL** SUFFERED--

-- AS THEY TRY TO RECLAIM A HOME BRUSHED BY THE HAND OF **DEATH**.

ELSEWHERE IN THE DARK...

KRAK!

SPCH!

COLD AIR RUSHES THROUGH NARROW PASSAGES THAT SEPARATE TOWERING STRUCTURES. HIDDEN WITHIN THESE SPACES ARE OUTCASTS OF SOCIETY TRYING TO MAKE THEMSELVES INVISIBLE AMID THE SHADOWS.

OUR HERO HAS NOW STAKED A CLAIM FOR HIS TURF.

SO **THIS** IS WHERE YOU'VE COME TO HIDE NOW.

ALONG WITH PIECES OF YOUR DESTRUCTION.

IT'S A REMINDER OF THE **HELL** I'M NOW LIVING. AND A **WARNING** TO MY **ENEMIES**.

SO TELL ME, **WHY** ARE YOU **HERE**, COG? I DON'T **LIKE** BEING FOLLOWED.

I'M HERE TO HELP YOU.

WHY?

BECAUSE *SOME*ONE NEEDS TO SHOW YOU WHAT THE *TRUE* FACE OF YOUR ENEMY LOOKS LIKE.

I ALREADY **KNOW** WHO THEY ARE. IT'S JUST TAKEN ME A WHILE TO **DO** SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED ***NOTHING!*** FOR ALL YOUR POWER YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW THIS NEW LIFE WORKS.

THOUGH YOU MAY BELIEVE OTHERWISE, VIOLATOR ISN'T DEAD, NO MATTER ***WHAT*** MAY HAVE HAPPENED TO ITS HUMAN FORM.*

THERE IS **ONE** PROPER WAY TO KILL A DEMON... WHICH, OBVIOUSLY, YOU HAVEN'T LEARNED.

JUST AS WITH THAT ***ANGEL*** YOU BELIEVED VANQUISHED, THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY APPEAR TO BE.

LOOK, OLD MAN. I'M NOT INTERESTED IN YOUR MUMBO JUMBO. RIGHT NOW, THOUGH, YOU AND I ARE DUE FOR A **GOOD LONG TALK.**

* LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

SO, NOW WHAT?

NOW I GET MY **POUND OF FLESH.** BEFORE CLOWN POPPED UP I WAS ON MY WAY TO WIPE OUT **WYNN**... AND AFTER THAT, **CHAPEL.**

YOU'RE JUST TRIGGERING A DOMINO EFFECT BY BELIEVING THEIR LIES.

WHAT? THAT CHAPEL WASN'T ACTUALLY MY KILLER? CLOWN ALREADY FED ME THAT ONE.

WELL, HE WAS RIGHT.

MIND MANIPULATION IS ONE OF THE WAYS HELL KEEPS YOU OFF-BALANCE. YOU'RE EASIER TO ***CONTROL*** IF YOU'RE NOT FOCUSED.

IF YOU WANT TO RETREAT AND THEN ATTACK AGAIN, ***FINE***. BUT DON'T RUN OUT ON THOSE HOMELESS FOOLS WHO CONSIDER YOU A FRIEND.

I DON'T **HAVE** FRIENDS. NOT ANY MORE.

THEN I ***PITY*** YOU, AL. BECAUSE THAT'S ALSO WHAT MALEBOLGIA WANTS-- FOR YOU TO BECOME ISOLATED.

WITHDRAWN.

THEY DESERVE BETTER.

WELL, ***ENJOY*** YOUR SOLITUDE AND YOUR NEW FRIENDS HERE. BESIDES BEING THE CARRIERS OF MAN'S SINS, THEY'VE ALSO BEEN KNOWN TO DRAIN ONE'S ***SOUL***.

BUT I GUESS YOU ALREADY ***KNOW*** THAT.

TELL WANDA I REALLY ENJOYED MYSELF TODAY, TERRY.

HOPEFULLY SHE'LL FIND STRENGTH TO GET HERSELF PAST ALL THIS. ESPECIALLY FOR CYAN'S SAKE. THAT LITTLE GIRL'S GOING TO NEED ALL THE ATTENTION SHE CAN GET FROM BOTH OF YOU THE NEXT FEW DAYS.

WE KNOW, GRANNY.

YOUR BEING THERE TODAY IS APPRECIATED MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW.

WANDA'S STILL A BIT SHAKEN, AND I KNOW SHE'S GOING TO WANT TO PUT ALL HER ENERGY TOWARDS CYAN AND IGNORE HERSELF.

SHE'LL NEED SOMEONE TO DISTRACT HER, TO RELIEVE SOME OF THE PRESSURE.

I'LL DO WHAT-EVER I CAN.

I'M COUNTING ON IT.

NOW YOU'RE SURE YOU DON'T NEED ANY HELP TO YOUR HOUSE?

YOU ASK ME THAT EVERY TIME, TERRY.

I MAY BE OLD AND BLIND BUT I CAN STILL WALK A FEW STEPS WITHOUT FALLING DOWN DEAD. *Hee hee!*

LORD BLESS YOU FOR ALWAYS CARING.

KISS CYAN AGAIN FOR ME.

BEFORE THE DOOR IS FULLY OPENED, THE ELDERLY WOMAN SENSES SOMETHING.

ALOOO?

IT'S NICE TO HAVE YOU VISITING AGAIN.

I'M SORRY IT'S BEEN SO LONG.

YOU NEVER MIND THAT.

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE HOW *GOD* HAS BEEN KEEPING YOU BUSY.

THAT'S NOT WHY I HAVEN'T COME.

IT'S BECAUSE... BECAUSE I'M AFRAID TO.

I DON'T UNDER-STAND.

YOU'VE BECOME MY LAST, TRUE CONNECTION TO THE PAST. EVERYTHING ELSE IS **GONE**. AND SINCE MY DEATH I DON'T LIKE WHAT I'VE BECOME... OR WHAT I'M TURNING INTO. I'M AFRAID THAT YOU'LL FIND OUT I'M NOT WHAT YOU **THINK** I AM.

I ALREADY KNOW WHAT YOU ARE, CHILD-- ***AN ANGEL***. SOMEONE WHO WATCHES OVER US IN OUR TIME OF NEED. WHO HELPS EASE OUR BURDENS.

THAT MUST BE A GREAT HARDSHIP. BUT HEAVEN ONLY CHOOSES THOSE WHO HAVE A STRONG WILL... AND A GOOD HEART.

STILL, HE CAN'T CONTROL OUR ***GUILT***. THAT'S ***OURS*** TO KEEP. YOU JUST HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO LET THAT GO.

I'M TRYING.

THAT'S NOT ENOUGH, AL. I CAN FEEL HOW *HARD* YOU'VE BECOME. THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I COULD SENSE ONLY *SOFTNESS*.

LET *GO* OF YOUR PAIN.

OTHERS NEED YOU NOW. LIKE *CYAN*. AND *WANDA*.

SHE BELIEVES *GOD* HAD A HAND IN RETURNING HER CHILD TO SAFETY. YOU'RE NOW A *PART* OF THAT.

WHICH MEANS YOU BRING *HOPE* AND *COURAGE*.

DON'T *SPOIL* THAT. BECAUSE, INDIRECTLY, YOU'VE BECOME *PART* OF HER FAITH.

AND WITHIN THAT LIVES HER *LOVE* FOR YOU.

HOURS LATER, THE EFFECT OF THEIR TALK IS STILL FELT:

CONFUSION.

FOR THOUGH GRANNY'S VIEWS BORE THEIR USUAL WISDOM, THEY WERE COUPLED WITH A TELLING OF THE "FACTS" OF CYAN'S KIDNAPPING.

HE MUST SOMEHOW DEAL WITH THE FACT THAT, BESIDES BEING A FOCUS FOR WANDA'S LOVE, AS SPAWN, HE'S ALSO A SOURCE OF HER **FEARS**.

BAM BAM BAM

HER HATRED.

CRUSH BAM BAM BAM

OW! DAMMIT!

SCRAAAPE BAM BAM

KRIK KRAK SPLAT!

OOPS!

SHLOOK!

BAM BAM

KUNK

KLINK

THE FINAL PIECE IS LAID TO REST, SILENCING THE CHAOTIC NOISE OF THE PAST FEW HOURS.

HOUR BY HOUR THEY LIVE, NEVER KNOWING WHERE THE NEXT MEAL WILL BE FOUND OR HOW THE ELEMENTS WILL BATTER THEM. MOMENTS LIKE THIS ARE RARE. THE DISCOVERY OF **PURPOSE** IN THEIR LIVES, HOWEVER **MEAGER**, IS SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN OFTEN.

SO WHO'S TO BLAME THEM FOR INDULGING THEMSELVES--

--CONGRATULATING ONE ANOTHER ON THE TWISTED CONSTRUCT--THEIR **MASTERWORK**--TO THE POINT WHERE THEY'RE COMPLIMENTING EACH OTHERS' COMPLIMENTS.

SAVORING THE MOMENT LIKE THE TASTE OF A NINE DOLLAR BOTTLE OF WINE.

GOD DAMN IT! WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?!

I LEFT FOR A **REASON**. CAN'T YOU GUYS GET THAT THROUGH YOUR HEADS? I CAN'T BE **INVOLVED** WITH YOU ANY MORE, BECAUSE WITH EVERY-ONE GUNNING FOR MY ASS, YOU'RE SAFER **NOT KNOWING** WHERE I AM.

JEEZ, AL. WE DIDN'T MEAN ANY-THING.

IT'S JUST THAT COGLIO-STRO SAID YOU MIGHT BE LOOKING FOR SOME COMPANY. SO WE KINDA COAXED THE DIRECTIONS OUT OF HIM.

WELL, HE WAS **WRONG**.

YEAH.

MAYBE HE WAS, BUT IF YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT THE COPS, YOU KNOW ***WE*** WOULDN'T RAT ON YOU.

AND ***WE*** SURE AS HECK WOULDN'T LEAVE WITHOUT TELLING ANYONE. YOU KNOW WE ALL ACCEPT THAT YOU'RE A SPECIAL CASE, SO WE'LL ***OVERLOOK*** THAT. BUT YOU ***STILL*** NEED ***FRIENDS***.

AND ***FRIENDS*** LIKE TO DO ***FAVORS***. SO WE THOUGHT YOU COULD USE ANOTHER ***LAZY-BOY CHAIR***.

DOESN'T HAVE AS MANY BODY PARTS AS THE *LAST* ONE, BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO.

GO ON! TRY IT.

IT'S FINE.

THEIR KING APPROVES.

THIS SIMPLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT IS ALL THEY WANTED.

HAVING RECEIVED IT, THEY GO OFF ON THEIR WAY, LEAVING SPAWN TO HIS OWN CONSIDERATIONS.

TIME BECOMES MEANINGLESS...

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT.

... AS NECROFLESH AND LIVING TISSUE OPEN UP TO THE RITUAL OF REBIRTH.

*... ASSISTED BY THE **WORMS** WHO NOW RECHARGE THE COSTUME'S AURA OF **SIN**...*

*... SLOWLY POURING THEIR ESSENTIAL EVIL OVER THE SYMBIOTE LIKE SOME GHOSTLY **SYRUP**.*

REALITY AND ILLUSION BECOME BLURRED.

THE UNIFORM'S HOST LAPSES INTO A BIZARRE, COMA-LIKE STATE.

WHAT'CHA *THINK*, SPAWN? HOW DOES IT *FEEL* TO BE COMPLETELY AT THE MERCY OF OTHERS?

YOU CONTROL *NOTHING* ANY-MORE. THOUGH, TO SOME DEGREE, YOU NEVER *DID*. THE SEED OF YOUR WORTH-LESSNESS WAS PLANTED LONG AGO, WHILE YOU WERE STILL IN YOUR MOMMA'S *BELLY*.

YOU PLAYED AT BEING SOME PATHETIC *PATRIOT*. *THAT* DIDN'T WORK.

IT ONLY BROKE YOUR WIFE'S HEART.

AND THE ONES YOU BLAME FOR YOUR DEATH? *FEH*. LIKE YOU-- *PUPPETS*.

AND HELL PULLS *ALL* THOSE STRINGS, ANY WAY WE SEE *FIT*.

YOU'RE ONLY WHAT WE *ALLOW* YOU TO BE. NOTHING MORE.

YOUR "MEMORIES"?

"YOUR" THOUGHTS?

WE GAVE THOSE TO YOU. SOMETIMES, THEY'RE ***REAL***. ***MOST*** TIMES, THEY'RE ***NOT***.

LET'S TRY AN ***EASY*** ONE, LIKE... WHO ***ACTUALLY*** KILLED YOU...?

WAS IT ***WYNN?***

WAS IT ***CHAPEL?***

DEATH HAS ***MANY FACES***, OLD PAL, AND JUST BECAUSE YOU ***BELIEVE*** SOMETHING TO BE, THAT DOES ***NOT*** MAKE IT SO.

WHO ***WAS*** IT, SPAWN? WHO ***BURNED*** YOU? WHO ***TORCHED*** YOUR SORRY LITTLE ASS INTO ***OBLIVION?!!***

AND EVEN IF I *GIVE* YOU A CLUE, HOW CAN YOU BE SURE IT'S NOT A *DREAM*?

JUST LIKE *ME*. AM I *DEAD*? DID YOU *KILL* ME? DO YOU REALLY THINK TWO SUCH CHILDREN, BORN IN THE DARKEST DEPTHS OF HELL, CAN EVER BE SEPARATED?

WE'RE *CONNECTED*. JUST LIKE YOU AND YOUR SYMBIOTE.

SOMEONE WHO EMBRACES EVIL TO ITS *FULLEST*. WHO *LUSTS* FOR POWER AND PRESTIGE. AND WHO IS, IN FACT, JUST *ANOTHER* OF OUR COUNTLESS PLAY-THINGS ON EARTH.

WE CONTROL *HER* AS WE CONTROL *YOU*. AS WE WILL SOMEDAY CONTROL *WANDA*.

SHE IS OUR *PRIZE!* --NOT *YOU*. THE ANSWER LIES WITH *HER*.

"SHE'S WHAT HELL'S AFTER AND YOU ARE *LEADING* US TO HER. HAHAHAHAHA HAA"

SO ANOTHER PIECE OF SPAWN'S UNHOLY TAPESTRY IS WOVEN--

--AND HIDDEN WITHIN ITS DESIGN, A FEW MORE ANSWERS--

--WHILE, HIDDEN IN THE BACKGROUND, THE POSSIBILITY OF A THOUSAND NEW QUESTIONS.

*OUR HERO FEELS FORCED INTO AN ABYSS OF PAIN AND TURMOIL. ANY THOUGHT OF REDEMPTION SEEMS A DELUDED **FANTASY.** YET, HE HOPES FOR **RELEASE.***

*THE OTHERS ARE LEFT **HELPLESS** BUT TO WATCH FOR THE **OUTCOME.***